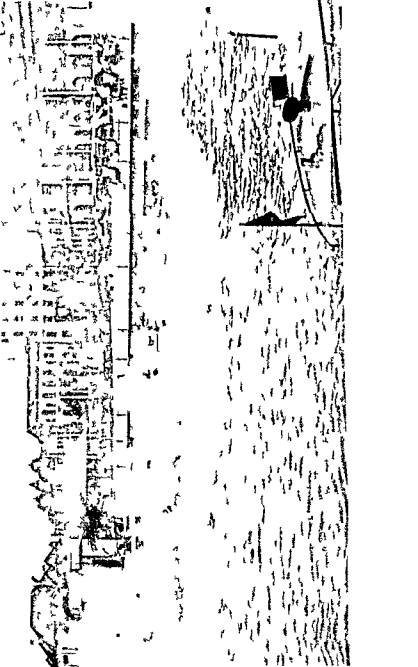


## EASTERN JOURNEY



# EASTERN JOURNEY

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PROLOGUE  
IN MALAYA AND SIAM

## CHAPTER I

*We come to the East through the tradesman's entrance,  
catching a fleeting glimpse of Java before our ship docks  
at Singapore*

WE had come from Australia. At Perth we had taken a small coastal steamer, which carried us haltingly up the sun-dried Nor'west Coast, and finally struck off from the great cattle-port of Derby, heading in the direction of the Dutch East Indies.

Most travellers come to the East by way of Suez and Bombay, and are acclimatized to its infinite variety in successive stages. The P. & O. smoking-rooms ring with names which suggest all the romance and glamour of far-off lands—Peshawar, Singapore, Mandalay, Shanghai—and the bronzed faces and stiff jaws of Empire builders revive memories of all one has read in the novels of Somerset Maugham and the love-stories contained in our more luscious novelettes. At Suez the East comes closer. Conjurers and fortune-tellers swarm aboard, while, on shore, all the nations of the Near East are mingled in a bustling, Oriental crowd. Thereafter, on the journey down the Red Sea and across the Arabian Sea the prospect of the East grows gradually more concrete, like the strains of a band which one hears first in the distance and then closer at hand, until Bombay itself sweeps round the corner, a rich extravaganza of colour, crowds and noise.

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For us it was different. Australia's Nor'west coast gives no hint of what the East will be like. Our ship was only a freighter, carrying a cargo of live sheep—and how they smelled when we entered the tropics! We were entering the East through the back door, where there were no flunkies in fine livery to meet us. We were being carried along in the butcher boy's basket, without the least knowledge of what lay in store for us.

On the morning of the third day out from Derby we awakened to a change of scene. Mists lay low over the smooth, unbroken surface of the water. On either side of us tall tropical mountains reared their pointed crags against the sky. Far away to the East the giant peak of Lombok towered fifteen thousand feet above us. Close by the ship a black fin moved softly through the water, accompanied by the occasional lazy splash of a powerful tail.

Slowly the sun dispelled the mists, and as the shores closed in on us we could see their waving palm trees and their terraced padi fields. The sails of native fishing craft dotted the water, quaintly primitive in shape.

We were passing through the Bali Straits. To our right the island of Bali, strange storehouse of ancient customs and traditions, slumbered peacefully in the hot sunlight, while to our left Java, less rugged, showing more evidence of cultivation, stretched backwards in a series of rising undulations to meet the tall mountains in the distance.

As we lay at anchor outside Bangoewangi a native sampan passed close by. A crude figurehead of a cock stuck out from its bows, and a large painted paddle did service as a rudder. Amidships a rough awning of palm-

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leaves shut off the sleeping quarters. Half a dozen Javanese sailors clad in sarongs of the brightest colours gave us a cheer as they passed, clambering about the scanty rigging, and vying with each other in striking suitable poses for our clicking cameras. They grinned from ear to ear, and shouted mocking greetings to us, until we were not at all sure who were the sightseers and who the sights.

Next morning we arrived at Sourabaya, and were plunged straightway into all the violent novelties of Eastern life. Beneath us on the dock the workers padded about barefoot over the dirty flagstones, but what they lacked in footwear they made up in their rich assortment of headgear. Some wore a small velvet fez, others a broad-brimmed hat which seemed to be made of wood and which came far down over their eyes, others a conical straw hat which rose to a peak high above the crown, and still others a turban of "batik" cloth twisted round the head and tied in a knot in the front. Otherwise they were clad in rags, rough pieces of cloth which had once been jackets and trousers, but which now hung about their skinny forms in a series of frayed and tattered strips. They seemed to express all that we had ever heard about the dire poverty of the East.

Outside the docks, however, we came upon another aspect of Javanese life—its rich colouring and variety. An endless procession moved along the road towards the town—men and women in costumes of every colour, carrying loads of every description. They wore a garment that we had not seen amongst the dock-workers—the sarong. It is a long skirt of coloured cloth which reaches down to the ankles, and looks brilliantly gay.

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especially when each person wears a different combination of colours so that scarlets, blues, mauves and oranges all mix together like a scene in an ambitious stage show. The sarong is an ideal costume, no buttons, no braces, not even a single shred of elastic. You just wrap it round your waist, give it a little twist to hold it in place, and the problem of dressing is over for the day.

But if the men were fascinating, the women were a sheer joy to behold. They came marching along the road, also wearing sarongs, but carrying their bundles on their heads. They walked like queens, straight as ramrods, with a gait as free and easy as that of powerful athletes. Each one was beautiful, and each contrived tastefully to mix the colours of her clothes, although the contrasts were so startling that they would have made any European woman who attempted them an outrageous freak.

The men carried their loads hung on the two ends of long poles which they balanced on their shoulders. And strange loads they were! Some carried fruit, some bread, some washing, but others were weighed down by an assortment of tin goods—pots, kettles, watering-cans, basins and tubs—while others were almost hidden under piles of enormous lampshades.

These lampshades puzzled us at first. They were far too large for ordinary rooms, and we could not imagine where the vendors would find a market for them. Then we came to the European residential quarter, and saw how the houses there were built. Life indoors is at a discount in the tropics. Each house was provided with a large porch which had been converted into an open-air room, covered over above, but with neither walls, nor

doors, nor windows on at least two sides. From the centre of each of these veranda-rooms hung one of the lampshades. At night, when the lights are all ablaze, the streets must look like fairyland.

Near one of the canals—it seems that the Dutch must dig canals wherever they go—we came upon a native market. Here were all the smells of Christendom—and of Islam and Hindudom as well! Holding our breaths we plunged in. It was chiefly a food market, and each stall was covered with strange foods, the like of which we had neither seen nor heard of in our lives. Nuts of a hundred different colours, sizes and shapes, exotic fruits, chilis, beans, cakes made of crushed dried prawns. Here and there wizened old women were frying queer concoctions in pans of deep fat, and in the centre of the market-place there was a patent-medicine quack entertaining the crowd on a squeaky instrument like a very primitive bagpipe.

A continual press of people flowed between the stalls, men, women and children clad in every conceivable form of costume from the dirtiest rags of the most wretchedly poor to the bright saris worn by the few Indian women in the crowd. In one corner there were some stalls displaying batik cloth of a wonderful intricacy of design, at prices which seemed ridiculously cheap—2s. 10d. for a huge square of exquisitely designed silk. The finest batik, we were told, comes from Samarang, where there is a large prison. The best craftsmen find it very difficult to regain their freedom once they have lost it. No sooner have they served one sentence than they are arrested on another charge, and set to work again.

For the whole morning and for a large part of the after-

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noon we wandered here and there through the streets and markets, fascinated by what we saw, drinking in every detail of this unbelievable new world. We could have gone on for ever, but the tropical sun does not welcome newcomers, and a time came when we felt that to walk another yard would be an impossibility. A taxi carried us back to the docks, and we slumped on to our bunks in a state of complete exhaustion to dream the wonderful dreams of a child who has just returned from his first visit to the Pantomime.

Two days later we docked at Batavia, and hurried ashore to drive into the town along the bank of a canal on which huge brown sailed barges moved ponderously over the placid water. It was Sourabaya all over again, but enriched by the knowledge of what to look for and what to expect. The canals were more numerous here, and flowed down the centre of the broad streets. Crowds of Javanese thronged the steps up and down to the water, where they were busy washing clothes, and on the tow-paths underneath the bridges small shops and stalls had been set up.

Batavia is older than Sourabaya, and dates back to the days when Java belonged to the Portuguese. It is really almost entirely native, for the European community (or what passes for a European community in a country where there has never been any hard and fast colour bar) lives in a suburb to the north called Weltevreden, where both homes and business houses are situated. Yet even it is only partly western. Natives throng its streets as much as they do those in Batavia proper, and even the most staid of the European homes contains more of the flam-

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boyance of the East than of the solidity of Rotterdam or the Hague.

Of course we went to see the Cannon. Every visitor to Batavia must see the Cannon. It lies outside the Penang Gate (a laboured piece of architecture built in the early colonial days) surrounded by the burnt fragments of paper rosettes which have been offered up in sacrifice. For the Cannon is a god, worshipped by all those who feel that their families have not come up to numerical expectation. Though the Javanese are Mohammedans, they are not so strict in their allegiance to the one and only Allah as the Prophet would have had them be. To them the old Cannon is an emblem of fertility, and possesses strange powers which are at the service of all those who supplicate it in proper form, and are worthy of the honour. The poor man burns a paper rosette before it; his wealthier brother burns a stick of incense. In either case, however, the caretaker, or priest, who supervises the ceremony and supplies the sacrificial emblems, makes a handsome profit.

Until recently the Cannon lay half-buried in the mud. It is a strange commentary on the Dutch colonial system that the Government has now excavated it, and set it on a concrete pedestal so as to be all the easier of access. The superabundance of children swarming in the streets seems to provide impeccable evidence of its efficacy, but probably the real reason for this act of salvation lies in the fact that a subject people are all the easier to manage if they are allowed to indulge their ancient superstitions. British experience in India provides many examples of that truth.



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From Batavia our ship turned north, and sailed up over the Equator, and through the maze of guardian islands into the harbour of Singapore. It was early morning when we arrived, and the slanting sun had not yet dispelled the mists which hung above the water; the contours of the islands were blurred, as though we were unable to focus our eyes on them, and, when we swept round a corner, and came in sight of Singapore we could only see a long white line stretched along the shore in which each building melted into its neighbours, and had no individuality of its own.

As we drew nearer we entered a crowd of shipping which thronged the entrance to the docks. Vessels of every size and description from tiny Malay sampans to ocean-going liners lay at anchor all around us. Chinese junks on whose bows were painted great staring eyes so that they might find their way across the open seas, freighters bound for China, their bridges heavily protected against pirates by steel bars and thick metal doors, ships from Japan, ships from India, ships from South Africa, from Holland, from France, from the United States, all mingled together into a display of tonnage representative of all the world.

Singapore is a cross-roads where every nation meets. Fifty shipping lines call there regularly, and, in addition, it harbours an immeasurable quantity of native craft of all sizes and descriptions. It is so situated that, discounting Russia's Trans-Siberian Railway, it commands the only entrance to the Far East, and thus occupies a key position in relation to the world's sea-borne trade. No wonder that we are building a powerful naval base there!

We crept up to the dock, ropes were flung ashore and

looped over bollards, winches began to clatter, and the ropes grew taut. Down went the gangway, and we were invaded by a host of coolies, agents, money-changers, officials and visitors come to claim their friends. In the general *melée* we escaped with those who had come to meet us, and not long afterwards we were sitting in their car driving through the streets of Singapore.

We had arrived in the East at last.

## CHAPTER II

*We spend a week in Singapore where we learn something of Malayan domestic economy and discover that we are in the New York of the East so far as the mixture of races is concerned*

SINGAPORE had little in common with either Batavia or Sourabaya. Chinamen swarmed everywhere, gay banners inscribed in Chinese characters hung outside the shops, Chinese girls in silk tunics and trousers walked up and down the pavements, sweating coolies loped along the roads dragging their rickshaws after them. There were Malays too, resplendent in their sarongs, and Tamils from the Madras Presidency, gloomy and forbidding with long hair hanging dankly over their faces, and their skinny bodies swathed in a single white sheet, and Sikh policemen whose beards made them seem more like deep mystics than traffic regulators. They all mingled into a fascinating panorama of the Eastern races.

Our car sped through the streets so quickly that we could only catch glimpses of the passing scene. Soon we had slipped out of the town proper, and were driving down a suburban road which was more like an English country lane than its tropical surroundings would have seemed to justify. It was lined by tall hedges, and here and there we could see the wire-netting of a tennis-court showing above them. Palm trees and hibiscus and frangi

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pani countered the illusion to some extent, but there was something in the orderliness and English respectability of our surroundings that made us rub our eyes, and wonder if it was really only a few minutes since we had been driving through the crowded streets of an Eastern city.

We turned in at a gateway, and drew up before the porch of a large two-storied house. A silent-footed Chinese servant carried in our suitcases, and we were led into a cool, airy drawing-room where we sank thankfully into arm-chairs, utterly exhausted by the heat of the sun, which was, by this time, almost directly overhead.

European houses in Malaya consist only of walls and holes in those walls. There are no windows as we know them, but only large rectangular holes with shutters which can be closed at night, or reed blinds which can be pulled down during the heat of the day. The floors are usually tiled (which makes one disgracefully lazy about cigarette ends), and the walls distempered in a light colour. Chairs and couches are made of canework, which ensures adequate ventilation, and beds are hard for exactly the same reason. Feather mattresses and the comfortable upholstery which makes life a blessing in England would only make it a torment in the tropics. There you want to sink into nothing—to let your body come into contact with as little as possible. Life in Singapore is a perpetual flight from the hot stickiness of the climate.

We were quickly made at home, and it was not long till we had accustomed ourselves to our new surroundings. The superabundance of servants who ministered to our wants was a trifle disconcerting to begin with,

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especially after our sojourn in Australia where democracy has decreed that service is degrading, but we soon learned to accept what gifts the gods offered, and to do as little for ourselves as possible

The Englishman in the East is a modern Sultan with rather enlightened ideas on the subject of slavery. By all the canons of slavery he is an excellent master, and is rarely known to exercise a punishment more severe than dismissal, in return for which he is waited on hand and foot. Flocks of silent servants see to every detail, even the housewife has only one duty, to have an interview with Cookie once a day.

In the normal household there are five servants, with Cookie at the head of the hierarchy. He presides in the kitchen, does the marketing, keeps order amongst the other servants, and occasionally consults his mistress, the Mem, on matters of policy. He is the household tyrant, and occupies a very privileged position. His wage is small when compared with European standards, but it is considered good in the East, and he is able to augment it by taking an unofficial commission on what he buys for the table. Only an inexperienced Mem, new to the country, will attempt to do her own marketing, for the market prices invariably double themselves at the sight of a white face, and Cookie is, therefore, in an excellent position for extorting blackmail. He adds a cent or two on to the price he pays, and keeps the difference. If the Mem objects, and attempts to take his place, then the bills rise enormously. The only course is to take it lying down, and hope that Cookie will observe moderation in his profiteering. This, be it said, he usually does, for his peculiar morality teaches him that, while he is quite at

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liberty to rob his employers of small amounts, he can entertain no hope of celestial bliss if he does it on a large scale.

Next to Cookie comes the Boy, who may be any age between sixteen and sixty. He attends to the housework, makes the beds, waits at table, and follows round after his employers repairing whatever damage they may do. He is constantly appearing from nowhere like a silent ghost, emptying an ash-tray or putting a cushion straight before retiring to the limbo from which he came. One of his chief duties is to attend to drinks, which is a very important branch of domestic economy in every Eastern household. The cry of "Boy" echoes through the house, and he appears in the doorway as though by magic, and receives orders for *s'tengahs*, *pahits*, gimlets and squashes with the air of a professional bartender. When everyone has been served he stands unobtrusively in the background, gliding out every now and then to refill an empty glass.

Then there is the Kaboon, who is nominally a gardener, but who seems to spend all his time brushing up dead leaves when anyone is looking, and sleeping under a tree when he thinks he is free from observation. Cookie and the Boy are usually Chinese. The Kaboon is almost invariably a Tamil, a long, lanky picture of misery clad in the dirtiest of rags. A smile rarely lightens his face; it is as though he contemplates his future as one endless avenue of dead leaves waiting to be brushed away, and finds the prospect grim.

The fourth member of the staff is the Sais, or chauffeur, who is usually a Malay. Malays are only occasionally willing to accept any other position in the household.

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They are firmly opposed to any form of hard work, but the duties incumbent on a Sais suit them admirably. He drives Tuan, his master, to the office in the morning, and then spends a very pleasant day gambling with other Saises while Tuan slaves away inside the office to make enough money to pay him his wages. That is how the Malay looks at it, he regards all white men as mad.

Last of all, if there are any children in the house, there is an Amah, a Malayan or a Chinese nurse. In addition to looking after the children she does all the sewing and mending, thereby relieving the Mem of yet another household care.

All the servants, excepting the Amah, live in a special compound at the back of the house. Their employers are not expected to keep them in food. They are simply paid their salary, and then left to their own devices. They do their own marketing and their own cooking and washing, living an entirely independent life along with their wives and families. Some even keep chickens, and the tennis-court is liable to be overrun by them at any moment. Moreover, one never knows when the air will be rent by the screams of one of the Kaboon's children, who has merited a sound spanking. But such disadvantages are inseparable from the Malayan servant problem.

The ease with which these different races work together shows that Singapore is only very partially Malayan. Actually it is the melting pot of the East, just as New York is the melting pot of the West. It's population is predominantly Chinese, and there are a fair number of Malays and Tamils as well, but it also harbours many Japanese, Siamese, Filipinos, Cingalese,

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Bengalis and Annamese as well. They all fit together reasonably well in these days of stirring nationalism. The reason quickly comes to light as we shall see in the next chapter.

Geographically Singapore is an island at the tip of the Malayan peninsula. It was only a little over a hundred years ago that Sir Stamford Raffles (now commemorated with a statue, a hotel, and a museum, to say nothing of Raffles Place) purchased it from the Sultan of Johore. It was practically uninhabited then, and it was only through Raffles' foresight that its possibilities were seen. He dreamed that one day a great city would rise there, a city which would control the whole of the Far Eastern trade. Possibly he also foresaw the great naval base which is being hurried on to-day, and which is making Singapore one of the most strongly-fortified islands in the world.

It is only natural that its importance should have attracted settlers from all over the East. The reason that the Chinese predominate is that they were in Malaya before us. They had settled there when we were making our first fumbling attempts at the colonization of India, swarming everywhere up and down the Peninsula, mining the tin which was later to make Malaya famous. They had established no official government, being quite content to take their places as subjects of the ruling Sultans, and when Europe appeared on the scene they very wisely made no objection to its penetration. They simply stayed on, and made no fuss about the change of rulers.

It has often been said that we have colonized Malaya for the benefit of the Chinese. I doubt if this is even half true; it is very rarely that an imperialist power proves so



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altruistic Nevertheless, a superficial examination of conditions in Singapore would seem to bear it out Who form the really wealthy class there? The Europeans? Certainly not There are plenty of millionaires, but they are invariably Chinese Here and there throughout the town are vast houses set in magnificent gardens They all belong to Chinamen In the great days of the rubber boom many Europeans made immense fortunes, but these Bonanza days have passed Malaya has settled down to a more humdrum existence, and the individual's chance of making a fortune there is small indeed The British residents can nearly all be placed in one of two classes Either they are salaried Government officials, or else they are clerks or managers in one of the big commercial firms or rubber or tin companies Very few of them are independent, very few can rise above a certain set income

These Chinese, however, who are better adapted to the climate, and who are not forced to spend their substance in 'keeping up appearances', can pass from strength to strength, and finally, if they are lucky, or thoroughly unscrupulous, attain to a very wealthy old age The rick shaw coolie is the equivalent of the London newspaper boy All the millionaires started by being one

But this does not mean that we manage Malaya for the benefit of the Chinese For every wealthy Chinaman there are thousands of impoverished coolies, who earn, at the best, a shilling a day, and though the Europeans work for a set salary, their firms make a very substantial profit, a profit which is divided out piecemeal amongst the shareholders at home To say that we run Malaya for the benefit of anyone but ourselves is to put a very

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exaggerated interpretation on a few isolated cases of Chinese success.

We have certainly succeeded in making Singapore into a city to be proud of. Its reputation at the end of the last century was none too savoury. Its narrow, congested streets harboured dens where every conceivable and inconceivable vice could be practised at a price, and all the dregs of Europe and Asia drifted to it as towards a magnet. Its nickname, "*Cesspool of the East*", was not altogether undeserved.

But times have changed, and the modern Singapore has done much to live down its evil reputation. Its streets are broad and clean; its drainage, both of actual and social sewage, hard to beat. In the heart of Chinatown there are still slums which would make our worst industrial areas look like garden cities—solid blocks of dwellings so ill-served by streets that those who live in the centre must make their way home by crawling through fetid passages and over the rooftops—but the number of these social sewers is decreasing every year, and, in comparison with most other Eastern cities, Singapore is fresh and open and surprisingly clean.

We shall return in a later chapter. Only a week after our arrival we bought a small second-hand car, and set off on a month's tour up and down the Peninsula, coming back for another month before setting out on the next stage of our journey.

### CHAPTER III

*We discover all manner of interesting facts about Malaya how it is more of a geographical than a political entity, the ritual of arrival at a rest house, the picturesque qualities of the native tongue, and why it is almost a Paradise of content*

NO sooner had we crossed the causeway which links Singapore Island with the mainland of the Peninsula, than we were stopped by customs officials. For all its concise compactness, the name, Malaya, really serves to cover three entirely different types of political entities. First there are the Straits Settlements, including Singapore, Malacca, Penang and one or two small districts, which are lumped together into a single British colony in the true sense of the word, and which are ruled direct from the Colonial Office. Secondly, there are the Federated Malay States, four in number, which are gathered under one Government, which is "British Administered". Lastly, there are a number of theoretically independent States which lie vaguely under British sovereignty, and whose Governments, i.e., Sultans, are said to be "British Advised", whatever that may mean in the language of diplomacy. Each of these three types has its own laws and its own customs duties, facts which give travel up and down the Peninsula a faint resemblance to travel on the Continent. One is continually crossing frontiers, for only the Federated States make up a single geographical

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unit, the others being scattered like seed up and down the length of the land.

Fortunately a white skin in the East carries with it a singularly undeserved reputation for honesty, and our numerous encounters with customs authorities were more in the nature of polite formalities than inquisitions. The officials were apologetic while we were blandly tolerant, and, though we could not speak each other's language, we exchanged the customary Oriental compliments by means of polite grimaces and gestures. Less than a minute sufficed to see us on our way.

That first day's drive was a sheer joy. The scenery was not particularly beautiful, for the road was lined either with pineapple or rubber plantations, both interesting in small doses but terribly monotonous when continued for mile upon mile. We would soon have grown tired of it but for the many picturesque sights to be seen; native huts standing on stilts above the ground, ancient cars loaded up with Chinese and Malays clattering past us, and an endless procession of people making their way in both directions. Some were on bicycles, but the majority were on foot, plodding along dressed in every conceivable colour and form of costume. Many wore a simple loin cloth, their brown bodies glistening in the sun, others sarongs, and a few strays European dress. Their features were all full of character, particularly those of the older people who were so wrinkled as to seem almost inhuman but for their bright, intelligent eyes. The children were the most fascinating of all. We could scarcely take our eyes off them. Babies sprawled about at the side of the road; toddlers, usually completely naked, gazed up at us with eyes full of curiosity and

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wonderment; and older children padded along on bare feet, giving us a mock salute and grinning from ear to ear.

Once we passed a gang of women coolies on their way to work. They were all dressed in the same manner, as though in uniform—the broad plate hats which Noel Coward has immortalized, and black alpaca tunics and trousers—and looked like a band of convicts as they shambled past us in double file. Their faces were blank and expressionless, and they shuffled forward rather than walked. The conception of women labourers is an Eastern one—or, rather, one which the West has temporarily outgrown—and this first glimpse of the practical results of the theory came to us with something of a shock. In our inexperienced eyes it approached so closely to slavery that we were blinded to the fact that it had all the sanctions of immemorial custom behind it. Later, when we became more accustomed to Eastern conditions, we came to see it in its proper perspective, and to appreciate that the real point was not their sex, but the system which made slavery a regular part of the day's routine.

We lunched at the rest house in a small town called Batu Pahat. Malayan rest houses really deserve a whole chapter to themselves, for they are remarkable institutions, and, since it is only in the largest towns that there are hotels, play a big part in the life of the country. They belong to the Government, and are really designed to accommodate Government officials when they are on tour, but stray individuals are allowed to make use of them. They are hired out to Chinamen who do the catering, and are allowed to make what they can out of it. To make sure that they are being well run each is pro-

vided with a suggestion book in which complaints may be registered, and in which there is always a pleasant hour's reading. Naturally some of these books are more entertaining than others, but in all there is a fair salting of comments, usually cast in a sarcastic vein, demanding reasons for livestock being found in the beds, or inquiring whether the mosquito nets have been intentionally seamed with holes. These Chinese hoteliers live in dread of complaints, and it is only after exercising considerable persistence that one can lay one's hands on the book at all. First it is lost, then it has been sent off for examination, then you are given a blank stare of incomprehension, but at long last, if you persevere, it will be put in your hands, and the Boy will heave a sigh of relief when he sees that all you want to do is to read.

On the whole the rest-houses are excellently run, especially those which are most frequented. We had few complaints to make, and many praises to bestow. In particular, the catering is excellent, and the prices low, for the Chinese are magnificent cooks, and are prevented from profiteering by the fact that all the prices, even down to a *s'tengah* or a box of matches, are fixed by the Government, and prominently displayed on the walls.

The procedure on arriving at a rest-house is always the same. You drive up at the entrance, and find it deserted. Then, climbing out of your car, you yell, "Boy!" Like a faint echo from somewhere in the nether regions comes back the answer, "Tuan." You wait, and nothing happens. Once again, louder and more stridently than before, you yell, "Boy!" Once again comes back the answer, "Tuan." Still nothing happens. Summoning up all your lung-power you bellow, "Boy!" in a voice fit to wake the

dead, and, as though by magic, he appears in the doorway, hastily struggling into his white coat. Only in the largest rest houses did we find it necessary to call just once. Elsewhere it was as I have described, and before we left the country it had assumed for us almost the solemnity of a ritual. We had been told that this would be the case before leaving Singapore, but we had taken it to be merely an exaggeration. Sure enough, however, we discovered at Batu Pahat that it took three cries to bring the Boy to life. Once, later on, I determined to experiment, and shouted for him only twice, but such a long wait ensued that I lost my nerve, and cried out for him the third time. Immediately he appeared, struggling into his coat as usual. There was magic in it.

Although not many of the Boys speak English the language problem presents few difficulties. Bazaar Malay is so simple that even the most slow witted tourist can master it sufficiently to make his way without difficulty. It must be the most laconic language ever devised. There are neither tenses, genders nor any other complications. There are only words which never change their form. *Bring* is *bawa*. *Wait* is *nante*. *Sudu* means *done, finished, over with*. If you want to say *brought*, *sudu bawa* means *done bring*, or *brought*. If you want to say *will bring* then *nante bawa* means *wait bring*, or *bring at some time in the future*. *Bawa makan lapan* means, literally, *bring food eight*, or, to the Malay, *serve dinner at eight o'clock*. Words like *sandwiches* might seem to create a difficulty, but if you do not know how to order them you merely go to the price list on the wall, and point to them. Though he cannot read, the Boy will know what you mean, as he has the whole price list memorized in his head.

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Let me digress for a moment and say something more about bazaar Malay. It is the language of the common man, of the coolie and the servant, and bears no relationship to the pure Malay which is the language of the Sultans and their Courts. The latter is rarely spoken by Europeans, and then only by Officials who have to make State calls at one of the Courts, when it is considered correct etiquette to conduct the opening conversation at least in the learned language.

But for all its simplicity, bazaar Malay is delightfully picturesque, especially in the rendering of new words which Western civilization has imposed on the country. Here are a couple of examples: *Mata* means *eye*, and *matamata* is the plural, meaning *eyes*. But it is also used to describe a policeman, or a *man who is all eyes*. An extension of this is *mata-mata galap*. *Galap* means *dark*, and the whole phrase means *the man who is all eyes and moves in the dark*. What better way of describing a detective?

This one is even better. *Kreta* is a *carriage*, and *api* is *fire*. *Kreta-api* naturally means *fire-carriage* or *train*. That is not so unusual. But how do the Malays say *express train*? The answer illuminates their somewhat virile minds, for they call it *kreta-api sambong*. *Sambong* means *proud*, and at first I could not figure out the connection. Then it was explained to me. What could be more expressive than *the proud train*, or, embroidering it a little more fully, *the train that is too proud to stop at the little stations*?

Later that day we were to see a little more of Malayan life. After Batu Pahat the scenery changed. Though we



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never saw the sea once, we were driving along a coast road, well out of the region of pineapple and rubber plantations. The western coast of the Peninsula is thick with mangrove swamps, being protected from heavy seas by the long island of Sumatra, and it is impossible to approach close to the water. On the inland side of the swamps there is a belt of coconut palms, and it was through these that we drove for the remainder of our journey. The scenery was untidy, for palm trees growing in a natural state rarely succeed in attaining much symmetry of form. They grow out of the ground at all angles, some reaching straight up into the air, but others leaning drunkenly at all kinds of impossible angles, and showing grotesque malformations as their trunks curve and twist this way and that, now rising perpendicularly, now twisting over to the horizontal, and then suddenly starting off at another angle, just like a motorist undergoing a sobriety test.

There was more evidence of native life here than on any other part of the road. Amongst the palms were small wooden huts, built, as is the Malayan custom, on stilts so as to stand some feet above the ground. The whole length of the road was crowded with people, some walking or bicycling, others sitting in groups outside their homes. They were nearly all Malays, and, as we were further from the westernizing influence of Singapore, they indulged their love of bright colours with a startling freedom. Purple, pink, lavender, royal blue, scarlet, rich emerald green, crimson lake—these and many other colours were worn by the men. The women, by contrast, were much more soberly clad, while more and more of the children appeared in nothing at all, running about at

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the side of the road completely naked, boys and girls alike. It was a picture of primitive content.

The Malay has earned himself the nickname of "Gentleman of the East". Mohammedan by religion, his civilization is practically non-existent by our standards, and yet he seems somehow to have captured one of the chief secrets of life, that of combining happiness with dignity. We look on him as intolerably lazy, for work is as foreign to his nature as is leisure to the American, but we cannot help admiring the detachment with which he views life, and the ease with which he achieves perfect content. He, in his turn, regards the White Man as indubitably mad.

"Here I am," he says, "without a penny to my name. I have my little rice field which provides me with my means of life. I do a little work in it each day, for that is all that I need to do. The rest of my time I spend in talking to my friends, in making love to my wife, in watching my children grow up, and in sitting by the roadside watching the world go by. I have my home, my wife, my children and plenty of leisure, and yet I have not a cent. Yet I am perfectly happy. But look at the White Man. He leaves his home, and comes to a strange land, where he works inside a house all day long. The climate does not suit him, and he has to send his children, and often his wife, back to his own country. And in return for this he gets a great deal of money which he spends on rich foods and expensive drinks. Clearly he is mad."

It is no exaggeration to say that this is the opinion of the average Malay. They are such easy-going people that they simply cannot find it in themselves to object to their rulers. They get a great deal of amusement out of Europeans (which they never trouble to hide), and only

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those suffering from a western education feel the calamitous urge of nationalism and discontent

They have all they want already. They accept the White Man, and look on him with a supercilious patronage. How the Englishman reconciles being laughed at with what he looks on as the dignity of his position I could never make out, but laughed at he certainly is, openly, and without the slightest attempt at dissimulation. He is the Malay's standing joke, but both he and the Malay are so good tempered about it that life flows on in perfect harmony, and the whole country is submerged in a delightful atmosphere of sheer happiness.

Nor is there any friction between the other nationalities. The Malay rather admires the wealthy Chinaman, and certainly does not dislike him. The coolies he disregards altogether, for they appear to him more like beasts. They toil and labour for very little reward, which is so patently ridiculous that they can scarcely be regarded as fully human. The White Man does at least get a reward which is, in his eyes, adequate, but the coolie lives in perpetual destitution. However, the Malay does have the sense to realize that if there were no coolies the White Man would set him to do their work, which would be appalling, and so he welcomes them, and looks on them as no worse than the water buffaloes which he finds so useful in his fields.

He regards the Indians in the same light. Imported labour is to him an excellent idea, and he would be the last to oppose it.

As for the coolies, they are too inarticulate to be able to express any resentment they may feel. The Chinese coolies live on the very confines of existence, especially

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those who are condemned to drag a rickshaw through the streets, and they will never have the wit to feel more than a dumb annoyance at the tricks of fate. The Indian coolies, on the other hand, are well pleased with themselves. They come, most of them, from the Madras Presidency where they were condemned as "untouchables" to perpetual ostracism from every decency of life. Though their condition in Malaya is poor they find it, by comparison, a perfect heaven on earth.

The wealthier of these immigrants are equally pleased with life. The Chinese financiers, rubber planters and tin miners, and the Indian shopkeepers and money-changers have no wish to see anything different. Where, anywhere in the world, are the wealthy classes really discontented? Altogether Malaya is as happy a land as one could ever hope to find—a Tory Eden in which each man is contented with his station, and does not wish for change.

But for how long? The Malays are being educated, and already some faint stirrings of nationalism are beginning to forecast a stormy future. For the present, however, Malaya is still a land of content, and, as we motored through those groves of drunken palm trees, we could only marvel at the peace and happiness and high good spirits which were evidenced by the smiling faces and bright clothes around us.

## CHAPTER IV

*We visit one of history's backwaters, see architecture run amok in Kuala Lumpur, learn all about taxi girls, suffer a minor set-back, and dream in a garden in Penang*

IN general, Malaya belongs to the New World, not to the Old. The lack of Malayan civilization has meant a lack of ancient buildings, a lack of solid customs and traditions, a lack of that faint fragrance that hangs over all places where great deeds have been done and great thoughts thought. The European has had no difficulty in establishing himself along with all the outward and visible signs of his mode of life. Malayan life was too idyllic to have left any mark behind, while that lived by the modern Malays is too peaceful to ruffle the efficiency and self assurance of the West. Orderly rubber plantations, mechanized tin mines, smooth macadamed roads, snorting railway trains, cinemas and newspapers, these are the hallmarks of modern Malaya. The country is a second American Middle West, gracefully tempered by the demands of the climate, the continued existence of the native stock, and the usual British objection to what is vaguely termed Americanism.

But no country is wholly divorced from its past. America has its New Orleans and its San Francisco, Mexico its Aztec, Toltec and Mayan remains; Australia its Sydney, and even modern

little New Zealand its quaint corners of Wellington and Auckland.

For some reason the history of the Europeans in Malaya finds its way into few text-books. It is an obscure corner of the world, and has had very little importance until recent years. The incidents which bulk large in its history seem to be only very small and unimportant ripples on the great tidal wave of historical progress. Only in Malacca, where remnants of them still remain, do they strike against the imagination, and impress their importance on the unwary visitor.

On the hill behind the rest-house stand the ruins of the old Cathedral of St. John. The phlegmatic English have transformed them into a lighthouse, thereby giving outward and visible effect to their inward and visible grace, but they still retain their old form, and, standing on emerald green sward and surrounded by scarlet-blossomed flame trees, bring back the days of long ago when Portugal was ruler of the seas, and had carried both her spiritual and her temporal dominion to what were then the furthest outposts of European endeavour. The Portuguese occupation was of necessity brief, but in the course of it not only the Cathedral was built, but also a strong fort on a nearby hill, while the foundations of a thriving trading station were also laid.

Then came the Dutch. There was battle and bloodshed, in which the natives, apart from those who had been converted to the true faith, took very little interest, and the trading station changed hands. The Portuguese atmosphere gave way to the Dutch; the Cathedral was allowed to fall into ruins, and the fort was occupied by Dutch soldiers. Dutch administration buildings were

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built, and a Dutch church. A thriving little town began to grow round the Portuguese nucleus.

Still later came the English. This time, living up to their reputation of being a nation of shopkeepers, they did not proceed by bloodshed. A Treaty of Exchange was drafted and signed, English administrators and officials moved in, and the Dutch moved out. The Dutch church became the home of the Church of England, the Cathedral was transformed into a light-house, the fort allowed to go to rack and ruin, but the town, now become the chief trading post for the whole Peninsula, continued to grow, and to attract to itself commercial adventurers both from the East and from the West.

The relics of the two earlier periods and of the first part of the third still remain, and give Malacca something of a historical air. It is bathed in an atmosphere which is a stranger to modern towns. Perhaps the best way of describing it is to say that it is at peace, for to anyone with the slightest conception of how much on edge and how restless a modern Oriental town can be, this must mean more than volumes of eulogies. One feels that it is not new, but old, that it has rooted itself well into the soil from which it has sprung, and that the life lived in it is one which has grown out of the past.

It was quite different from any other Malayan town that we visited. There seemed to be more Malays in it, and they had indulged their love of colour in many diverse manners. Their bullock carts were covered with canopies of plaited palm leaves, curved up at either end, and painted in bright colours. Many of the houses were decorated with coloured tiles, and the padang, or public

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green, where children flew their kites, and men and women gathered to gossip of an evening, was rich with the gay sarongs so distinctive of the Malayan race. The old buildings too provided a new experience. Ruins are far more lovely in the tropics than elsewhere, for they stand out nobly against the flawless blue sky, and the rich tropical vegetation engulfs them in a maze of blooms.

We tasted Malacca, and enjoyed it to the full. Like a modern by-pass avoiding an old village, the railway slips past it, being linked to it only by a branch-line. It slumbers peacefully in a ripe old age, largely unconcerned about the outside world, and serenely contented with its lot. In the small church which the Dutch had built I read an inscription on a tombstone that called up the past more vividly than any other fragment in the town. It covered a lady's grave, and read:

THIS STONE WAS ERECTED BY A DISCONSOLATE  
HUSBAND AS A FINAL MARK OF RESPECT FOR AN  
AMIALE AND AGREEABLE SPOUSE

Shades of Jane Austin! Her epoch was not unknown even here!

A journey through further interminable lanes of rubber trees brought us eventually to Kuala Lumpur, the capital of the Federated Malay States, which, like all Federal capitals all over the world, has developed an extraordinary disease which can best be described as architectural elephantiasis. It bristles with buildings which are rich and strange, and too clean and new to seem anything but exhibition models.



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When we arrived we set out to look for the Station Hotel, Kuala Lumpur being one of the larger towns, and boasting, therefore, something less temporary than a rest house, but we could see nothing even faintly resembling our conception of what a hotel should be like. Our directions took us past a large white mosque, but we could see no sign of the hotel anywhere. Eventually an Englishman directed us back again, and once more we passed the mosque. It was not till we came back to it a third time that we realized that it was no mosque at all, but simply a railway station which, according to the best canons of modern decorative art, had been elaborately constructed to resemble the last thing on earth it was supposed to be.

If a mere railway station was so elaborately disguised, what would the Secretariat or the Post office be like, we wondered. Actually they were betrayed by their bulk, but their more detailed appearances were decidedly extraordinary. The Secretariat was a veritable Buckingham Palace which seemed to have been designed by an Indian Arab half-caste. The Post Office was magnificent, but indescribable. The other buildings were equally outstanding. Still, they were all very fine, and gave Kuala Lumpur a distinctive, if not altogether dignified, air, and it would be discourteous to cavil at them on pedantic grounds.

It was at Kuala Lumpur that we were initiated into our first experience of Malayan night life. I had an introduction to a member of one of the business firms, and, on the first opportunity, I rang him up to arrange a meeting. It was agreed that he should call at the hotel at about seven, and at that hour we met him in the lounge. We

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sat down to a drink, followed it with another, and then I suggested dinner. Preposterous! We must come along to the Spotted Dog first, where there was a *Thé Dansant*. The Spotted Dog, it appeared, was the name of the Selangor Club, the main refuge of all the Europeans in the town, barring those who were sufficiently high on the administrative scale to belong to a more exclusive institution, known colloquially amongst the lesser fry as the Brass Hat Club. *Thé Dansants* were held frequently, but, despite their name, they rarely began before six, and continued well into the evening. It was about eight when we arrived there, and we sat down over still more drinks. The *Thé Dansant* was in full swing. At one end of the room a coloured jazz band played away lustily on saxophone and cymbals, and the dance-floor was crowded. The tables were mostly all occupied, and the lusty cry of "Boy!" which invariably precedes every drink in Malaya, echoed continuously across the room. It ought to have been called a *S'tengah Dansant*.

Drink followed drink as we sat watching the dancing and occasionally taking part in it, but there was no mention of dinner. Platefuls of *hors d'œuvre* (known in Malaya as *makan kiki*, little food) made occasional miraculous appearances, but we had lunched at the normal hour of one o'clock, and they only served as appetizers. Once or twice I mentioned tentatively to our host that we might return to the hotel for dinner, but he always waived the suggestion aside with a sweeping gesture. "Good heavens, no. We never dine here till ten or thereabouts." We had another drink.

At about half-past nine he looked at his watch.

"What about going on to the Great Eastern?" he

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suggested "We can get something to eat there" Obediently we followed him, devoutly hoping that he was right

He was Once upon a time the Great Eastern had been a Chinese owned hotel, but it had since degenerated into a dance hall cum restaurant, at which both Asiatics and Europeans were welcome It was fairly crowded with a mixed set of white people, mostly young men like our host, together with Eurasians, Malays, Indians and Chinese, but our white skins put us in a position of superiority over these latter, and we were provided with a table to ourselves

During a leisurely meal I watched the people Jazz, it seemed was as popular amongst Asiatics as amongst Europeans, and, let it be said, more finely executed They moved with an easy lightness, and indulged in more intricate steps than those common in a European dance hall

Most curious of all was the system of girl partners There were a couple of dozen of them, mostly Chinese, and they charged ten cents, about threepence, for each dance Of this a half went to the house They were small and petite, and each wore a dress of the same cut, though of a different material It was the traditional Chinese costume for evening wear, a one piece dress coming up high round the neck and reaching down to the ankles, but slit up to the knee on either side so that each movement showed a sudden flash of delicately formed calf It was a provocative costume for all its traditional authority, and as each of the girls was extremely pretty in a fragile, Oriental sense, I must confess that I had my doubts about the complete propriety of the institution Our

host was really shocked at the idea. Nothing could be further from the case, he assured us vehemently. The girls were all thoroughly respectable, and the men that came there knew it. There might be occasional lapses, for after all, human nature is human nature; but I would be making a great mistake if I thought that there was anything fundamentally wrong. The "taxi-girl" was common in every dance hall in Malaya, and the Government made not the slightest objection. As for the Europeans present, they simply came to dance without any ulterior motive. They knew perfectly well, Bruce Lockhart notwithstanding, that any close relationship with an Asiatic woman would be the equivalent of social suicide.

He looked at his watch. Just time for another drink, and then we would go off to a real native dance hall.

The Bukit Bintang Dance Hall turned out to be entirely Asiatic in the composition of its clientele; but the reader will be grossly disappointed if he expects to hear of strange ritual dances, weird Oriental music or rich Eastern costumes. It resembled nothing so much as a plebeian English *Palais de Danse*. Very few of the Malays there wore even sarongs, having preferred to dress up for the occasion in white ducks. The Chinese were equally European. The band might have been imported direct from America, and above it there was an illuminated sign telling whether the dance in progress was a Waltz, a Fox Trot, a Tango or a Black Bottom. Round the floor sat fifty or more taxi-girls who appeared to be doing a brisk trade, for the one point in which Malaya has not yet caught up with the West is in the woman question. Till they marry young men are unattached, and, after they are

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married, they leave their wives at home while they go out to enjoy themselves

It was a most surprising wind up to the evening. It made us realize how very much a part of the new world Malaya really is, and how little lies between the respective temperaments of East and West. Five years ago, we were told, jazz had scarcely penetrated beyond the European clubs. To-day its popularity is increasing by leaps and bounds. It would be strange indeed if East and West were to find their common denominator in the African jungles!

More rubber trees!

But eventually we were treated to some real scenery. We were verging on the mountainous region of the Peninsula, moving parallel to the mountain chain that reaches down from the north like a massive backbone, and for the greater part of the drive from Kuala Lumpur to Ipoh soft, jungle-clad hills rose up on our right hand, while from time to time the jungle closed in on us so that we were driving between tangled walls of greenery through which the eye could not penetrate for more than a few yards. In such places the air was heavily laden with the hot house smell of warm, abundant vegetation, as though the air itself was pregnant with the seeds of life. It pressed down on us, cloying and intoxicating, drugging our senses with its richness, and stirring our feeble imaginations as opium stirs the lifeless coolie with his pipe.

As we drew near Ipoh craggy limestone cliffs reared themselves from the roadside. Trees and flowering shrubs sprang from their crannies and ledges. Black,

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gaping holes betrayed where centuries of weathering had dug caves into the soft rock, and here and there, standing out against the cliffs as though actually a part of them, were the façades of Chinese buildings—the fronts of temples into which some of the larger caves had been transformed.

We stopped at one of these, and climbed up a wooden staircase into the temple-cave. At first we thought we had invaded a private house, for on every landing we found beds, tables, chairs, food and all the other appurtenances of domesticity, and when we reached the cave itself we found it set with chairs and tables like a café. However, it really was a temple, for in the further darkness we discovered all the gods, images and brightly coloured scraps of paper that combine to complete the Chinese idea of a place of worship. At the very back there was an altar on which stood several lamps and a few sticks of burning incense, while beside it were all the “musical instruments” of the Chinese religion, drums, gongs, bells and hollow wood (all things for hitting—none for blowing or scraping).

From the roof above the altar hung hundreds of gaily-coloured banners, not unlike the little aprons that masons wear in front of their tummies. We thought that they were made of cloth, but a Chinese boy who spoke a few words of English and had appointed himself as our guide, told us that they were really made of paper. Pointing to an elaborate lantern that hung in the centre of the cave, he told us that it also was made of paper, and that it had cost \$300—a hint that we duly acknowledged before we left.

Turning back to the forepath of the cave we dis-

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covered that we had not been altogether wrong in thinking it a café. While we had been examining the altar and the banners and the lantern and the little doll like gods all dressed up in their finest paper clothes, one of the tables had been set with bottles of lemonade, a plate of sugar biscuits and a dish of dried lichee nuts. We were invited to sit down and make a repast—which we did gingerly, fearing to hurt the feelings of our little Chinese guide, who beamed all over his face on our acceptance. Having drunk a bottle of lemonade between us and made a pretence of toying with the biscuits and nuts, we took our leave, first of all signing the visitor's book which, in true Western style, was kept in a prominent place beside a large and obvious collecting box.

Of Ipoh there is little to be said. It is the centre of the tin mining industry, a modern small town full of clean new buildings, ringed round by mountains which appear a hazy blue in the hot hush of the midday sun. Like the houses which line all our main roads, it is "strictly modern", even down to the chessboard formation of streets so reminiscent of every American small town, and to the cinema advertisements which occupy all the available free space.

Yet its setting is Chinese. At night we wandered down a street lined with eating stalls and rich in the spicy smells of Eastern cooking. The Chinese coolie rarely eats in his own house. He comes out into the streets, and makes his choice from the bewildering variety of dishes offered at the various stalls. Judging by our sense of smell we envied him the right to pick and choose amongst them, but looking closer at the actual products of the pots, we felt more doubtful.

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One very charming sight was a tiny table at which sat half a dozen children, olive-complexioned with great, luminous, black eyes, all eating away as hard as they could, and manipulating their chopsticks with a dexterity which put our own fumbling efforts to shame. Here was something which belonged fully to the East—and yet, when we moved out of that street into another, we came upon a crowd of Chinamen waiting patiently in a queue outside a cinema where a Hollywood version of Rider Haggard's *She* was being shown.

Disaster overtook us on the road between Ipoh and Penang. Unbeknown to us the petrol tank had suddenly sprung a leak, and with an unexpected cough and splutter our car came to a rest outside a tiny village. A crowd of Malays, Chinamen and Tamils quickly appeared, but there was not a word of English among them, and, although it was easy enough to explain our predicament, there was no method of discussing possible remedies. They all chattered loudly, but my only impression was one of helpless confusion. There was no petrol in the village, that was plain enough, and, though our eyes searched longingly up and down the road, no other car came in sight. Our own car was pushed into the shade, and, pensively, we settled down inside it to consider ways and means.

Then suddenly I heard the blessed words:

"Tuan. Tuan. Man get benzine two miles."

It was the village headman, or some other such personage, a middle-aged, skinny, black Malay in nothing but a loin-cloth. I could have fallen on his neck. We arranged that he should send a boy on a bicycle for some



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petrol, and, to while away the time, I twisted an old newspaper into a funnel so that, when it did arrive, none of the precious liquid would be lost. Alas! My inventive faculties turned out to be the scorn of the neighbourhood. When the boy returned he took one contemptuous look at my handiwork, and then crossed the road to where a newly fallen palm tree lay on its side. He pulled off a leaf, twisted it into the shape of a funnel with a single movement, and then poured the petrol into the tank without the loss of a single drop. The surrounding Malays cackled joyously.

We reached Penang without further mishap, crossing over to the island on the large ferry. Well does it deserve its title, "Pearl of the Orient"! The Crag rises high into the air, its flanks heavy with luxuriant tropical foliage, while on the few miles of flat land fringing the coast flame trees, golden rain, hibiscus and frangipani mingle in a constantly-changing panorama of gay colours and intoxicating scents. The town, which normally takes its name from the island as a whole, but is officially known as Georgetown, is a quiet, sleepy little backwater of palm-lined avenues and spacious gardens, and even its congested Chinese quarter seems less squalid and overcrowded than that of Singapore.

There is something magical about its peace. One of my favourite memories of the East centres round its evening quiet. We had been playing badminton in the garden of a private house, but, as darkness came down, we had settled on chairs out in the open air to drink and gossip till dinner called us in. But somehow the talk began to fail, and we forgot to fill our empty glasses. We were

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content to sit there motionless, letting our senses and our imaginations drink in all the boundless beauty of our surroundings. Graceful palm trees stood up in black silhouette against the pink-tinged evening sky. At the foot of the garden a hedge of frangipani trees was sunk in the darkness, only their white blooms piercing their way to us through the dusk. The air was warm, bearing a faint fragrance of exotic scents, and not even a breath of wind disturbed the silence.

Occasionally we could hear the whirr of bicycle wheels passing quickly along the road, and now and then the voices of a couple of Tamils, talking in high-pitched accents as Tamils always do. In a house, far enough away for its noises to be subdued by distance, even in that uncanny quiet, someone began to play a Chinese gramophone record, and the strange music came floating across to us, not as an interloper, but as part and parcel of our natural surroundings. It was as though we ourselves were merged in them; as though we had lost our personalities, and had become but errant atoms in a vast molecular construction, inseparable from the rest, and meaningless without them. How long the mood lasted it is difficult to say—in the infinite there is no such thing as time—but when it had passed, and we were human beings once again, tied to ourselves and to our senses, it seemed in retrospect as though we had been passing through a dream.

But every evening in Penang was not so peaceful. It was the season of the Sumatras, short, sharp squalls which suddenly spring up from nowhere, and on more than one occasion we were forced to run from them. We would be sitting quietly out in the hotel garden facing

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on to the sea. Thunder and vivid lightning in the distance would give us warning of what was coming, but the air about us would remain perfectly still, so quiet that a match would burn without a flicker. Then, very suddenly, there would come a slight rustling among the trees, a premonitory call to go while we still could, and less than ten seconds later the Sumatra would be on us, tearing at the branches, overturning tables and chairs, setting us all scurrying for shelter while the unfortunate waiters tried to salvage what they could from the wreckage. After five minutes or so it would go as quickly as it had come, and down would come the rain to the accompaniment of gigantic crashes of thunder and lurid lightning which would illuminate each falling drop, and make the deluge sparkle like a jewelled screen.

Possibly Penang derives its romance from the fact that it is a famous place for weddings. It is the first port of call for ships from the West, and young men come from all over the East, from as far as Shanghai and Tokio, to meet their brides, and have their union blessed by one of the many churches which have almost to work overtime to meet the demand.

On our first night there we were sitting in the dining-room of the hotel when four men came in, and sat at a table close to ours. They were large, burly specimens of manhood, bronzed by the sun, regular rubber planters from the pages of Somerset Maugham. They had come to town, we thought, for one of these periodical orgies in which all rubber planters are supposed to indulge. Each looked as though he could put down two bottles

neat as an *aperitif*. We were not in the least prepared for the first words of their table talk.

It was the burliest and most muscular of them all who spoke, not in the husky tones we had been expecting, not even in a manly bellow proportionate to his appearance. Indeed, he cooed his words as softly as any cooing dove.

"That was a lovely wedding this afternoon, wasn't it?"

Which only shows that Penang, like music, hath powers to tame the savage beast.

## CHAPTER V

*As we return to Singapore we visit a hill station, discover a chain store in the jungle, follow a road to nowhere, and soliloquize on the difference between East and West*

THERE is not much to be said of the first part of our return journey, for bad weather kept us to the road by which we had come. It was not till we were nearly back in Kuala Lumpur that we struck off in a new direction, and cut up into the mountains, making for the hill station which is known as Frazer's Hill.

Almost immediately after leaving the main road we began to climb, and it was not long till we had out-reached the cultivated rubber plantations and come into wild, mountainous jungle country where the twisted tangle of trees and undergrowth reached up and down the mountain flanks in an incredible chaos of branches, tendrils and leaves. Here and there a boiling torrent would come leaping down towards the road, slip beneath it, and then continue its plunging, spray bound flight into the depths of the valley far below us. There were few people to be seen, but once or twice we came upon a Chinese sawmill where coolies were engaged in the laborious task of sawing up the great trunks of the jungle trees by hand.

The last section of the road is a dangerous one, having so steep a gradient that only one way traffic is allowed,

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and before attempting it cars must check in with the authorities at the foot. In five miles it rises very nearly two thousand feet, and woe betide the driver whose brakes are out of order, or who has forgotten to fill his radiator! Twenty minutes is quite sufficient for the ascent, but under the hot equatorial sun even the best car ever built would show signs of strain. Our little Morris began to boil before we were half-way up, and it was only by exercising the greatest restraint that we kept ourselves from drawing up for a minute or two to give her a rest. That would have been fatal, for we would probably have been unable to start her again, and if we had been behind our time in arriving at the top a search-party would have been out to look for our remains. The only course was to plug on steadily upwards, and eventually we were rewarded with the sight of the control house where we drew up to a thankful stop, and allowed the car to blow off clouds of steam to its heart's content.

However nerve-wracking that drive may have been, it was well worth it. The air is crisp and cool on Frazer's Hill, and it is possible to walk about unconcernedly in the middle of the day, overlooking magnificent panoramas of mountain scenery. English flowers grow in the gardens, roses, magnolias and lupins, and at meals you can eat vegetables which have come straight from the earth without passing through the vaults of a cold-storage company.

It is the favourite hill-station in Malaya, and in atmosphere it is exactly like an English holiday resort. Everyone there is on holiday, and out to have a good time; everyone is on good terms with everyone else, and to

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walk for any distance down any of the roads is to meet with a continual succession of greetings. There is a small nine hole golf course, made, literally, by filling in a valley with fresh earth, and close to it there is a small general store cum cafe (run by a Chinaman, of course) rejoicing in the name of the Maxwell Arms. It acts as general meeting place for all the visitors. It is the "village pub" of any holiday resort, and the people who collect there any morning are exactly like the people you can see on holiday in England. Plus fours for the men and tweeds for the women—garments which the climate has exiled from the country below—are the normal dress, and there is no mock solemnity about dressing for dinner at night. You wear what you want to wear, and no nonsense!

Here was something quite at odds with the normal conception of the Englishman in the tropics. It is a conception which does not fit Malaya at all, but down by the coast the white suits and topees worn by the men give the country an undeserved atmosphere of sahibs and wallahs.

In a happy land like Malaya there is less reason to worry about Prestige than there would be if the natives were discontented, and in a place like Frazer's Hill, where the white man can return to his own peculiar habits, and enjoy himself in his accustomed ways, this fact proves itself all the more strongly. All these people were Britishers on holiday, not officials and administrators and traders, not lords of all they surveyed, not the conceited idiots they are so commonly supposed to be. Later, when we had visited some of the hill stations in India and discovered how different conditions are there, we saw how

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true this estimate of the White Man in Malaya had been.

We stayed only a couple of nights in Frazer's Hill—delicious nights when we huddled under blankets with just our noses poking out above them. Time was getting on, and we had other places to visit before returning to Singapore. On the morning of the third day we packed the car again, and ventured out on that almost perpendicular road once more. The journey down was more pleasant than the journey up, but as we descended lower and lower the heat of the valleys reached up at us, and soon we were sweltering again with only the memory of the last two days to remind us of what comfort could be like.

Instead of returning to Kuala Lumpur we pressed on further East until we had come down on the other side of the mountain range into the State of Pahang. We put up for the night at the rest-house in the small town of Raub.

Pahang is known as the jungle State, for it is far wilder than the others. Its distance from the coast and its inaccessibility by railway made it unpopular among the rubber planters, and it is only recently since roads have opened up the country, and the lorry has in some measure superseded the train that it has come into its own. Most of its rubber plantations are young, and there are still vast areas, even fringing on the main road, which have not yet been cleared. You can see more of primitive Malaya, while still on the beaten track, than is possible elsewhere.

And yet progress has made its mark. Raub is essen-



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ually like any other Malayan small town, consisting chiefly of a single street, lined on either side with shops. Two points struck me. The first was the sight of a party of Tamuls in a field close by the road, who were engaged in "putting the weight" in preparation for some local sports. The other was a notice above one of the shops. First came the name of the Chinese owner, and then below it

### COLD STORAGE AND PROVISION MERCHANTS HEAD OFFICE IN KUALA LIPIS

Chain stores in the jungle! We were certainly still on the beaten track.

Our first morning dawned drizzly and almost cold. The sky was heavily shrouded with grey, misty clouds. We were disappointed, but we were told that this was a regular Pahang morning, and that by ten thirty the sun would appear again. Sure enough, the prophecy was fulfilled. A wet morning is a Pahang speciality which is steadily attracting more rubber planters, for it means that the early part of the day, when most of the planter's work is done, is moderately cool.

We spent that day in following a road which led to now here. We saw it on the map, striking up northwards, and coming to an abrupt end in the middle of the jungle, and as we were anxious to see something of the wilder parts we decided to follow it. For about ten miles we travelled past rubber plantations interspersed with jungle, the latter becoming more frequent the further Raub lay behind us. Then without any warning the road came to an end, and was succeeded by what the map called a

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"trace-road", a name which flattered it a great deal. I doubt if a car can have travelled up it more than once a month or so, for it was merely a clearing through the jungle, and seemed more like a fire-break than anything else. A very rough track, thickly overgrown with grass and weeds, ran down the centre, while on either side the jungle weaved an impenetrable web of foliage.

There was nothing to look at apart from the jungle. It was as though we were driving between two high stone walls for all the view we could get. Once we passed a few cattle, which were so surprised at our arrival, plunging this way and that in fear, that it was obvious that they had never seen a car before.

The greatest excitement of the day was a glimpse of a family of aborigines. They were not pure aborigines, but, equally, they were neither Malays, nor Indians nor Chinese. They were short of stature, clad only in the briefest of loin-cloths, and their black, woolly hair, thick lips and flat features stamped them as definitely negrito. There were four of them, two being children, and they were moving slowly along the road. In one hand the man carried the long, thin blow-pipe which is the sole weapon of these jungle tribes. The woman, of course, carried the heaviest bundle.

Sakais, as the aborigines are called, are only rarely seen outside the jungle. They shun the roads, and keep exclusively to their jungle homes. Even to the Government they still remain very much of a mystery, living lives of their own wholly unconnected with the pseudo-Western system which has been built up for the other Asiatics. That is why I say that these could not have been pure Sakais. They may have been pure in blood, but they

had been tainted by the touch of civilization; otherwise they would not have been walking along this embryo road. Yet we were lucky to catch even that glimpse of them. You can live a lifetime in Malaya, and yet see no more of them than if you never stepped out of the lounge of Raffles Hotel.

The trace-road came to a sudden full-stop after about ten miles. That was all there was to it. The jungle closed in in front of us, and we were forced to a standstill. Before turning back we walked into the jungle for a few yards. It was an uncanny experience. Everything was dead quiet but for the calls of some invisible birds and the continual churring of insects. It was damp and dark too, and although it was not as dense as it had seemed from the outside, it would have been only too easy to lose oneself in it. If we had ventured out of sight of the spot where we entered I would not have given much for our chance of finding our way out again. There were no tracks, no outstanding irregularities by which one could mark one's direction—only a tangle of undergrowth so innocent of any regular form that no one section of it was distinguishable from another. Above, the light of the sun was almost entirely hidden by the thick canopy of branches and leaves, and at night scarcely a single star, let alone a guiding constellation, would have been visible.

In its silence and immensity, and in its teeming life which expressed itself in thousands of small sounds, and yet seems no more than a part of its silence, the jungle is more terrifying than any other of Nature's wonderlands. Great mountains and valleys inspire awe; but the quiet expectancy of the jungle, its atmosphere of mystery

and of hidden forces waiting their opportunity to pounce, its grim changelessness and monotony, all press down on whoever ventures within it, forcing him against his will and against all rational sense to turn and free himself before it is too late. There is nothing extraordinary in its being the seat of the darkest superstitions of mankind.

As we returned to Singapore we left the main road once more at Kuala Lumpur, and drove to Malacca by way of a number of twisting by-roads which carried us through some typically Malayan scenery. Here were few rubber plantations, the land being given over almost exclusively to the cultivation of rice. Every flat acre of land was cut into small, square padi fields, giving it the appearance of a vast chess-board. In no two of the fields was the rice at the same stage of growth. Here only the seeds had been planted, and the flooded field presented an unbroken shining surface to the sky; here the first few shoots were sprouting up; and here the whole field was thick with the bright emerald green of growing rice. Here and there were small Malay *kampongs*, collections of half a dozen small wooden huts raised on stilts a few feet above the ground. Children were playing in the shade, while their mothers, busying themselves about the house, smiled out at us through the windows, giving us a cheering wave of the hand.

As we drove into Malacca we found some coolies engaged in building a new bridge for the road, and we stopped to watch them driving in the piles. It was a very primitive process. A heavy concrete weight was suspended over the pile by a rope which ran over a pulley and was held by six sturdy coolies standing on the firm

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earth At a word of command from the foreman they would strain in unison at the rope until the weight had been pulled up as far as the pulley would allow Then they would let it drop so that it fell with a heavy thud on the pile, driving it an inch or two deeper every time

There lies the difference between East and West Manpower is cheap in the East, and the standard of living is so low that, from the employer's point of view, it would be an extravagance to import machinery to do work which can be done more cheaply by human labour Mechanization has made little progress, except in the case of goods which cannot be produced without machines In road building, in loading and unloading ships, in excavating and mining, it is human muscles that take the strain, and human backs that carry the load It results in a slowing down of the tempo of life, and though it means sweat and energy for some it is undoubtedly what gives the East its air of quietness and repose

Language, clothing, food, even philosophy are all minor differences in comparison to this—that while we in the West are anxious to master the world, the East is anxious only to live in it The East is content with what it has, we are always looking for improvement and change In the clash between the two it is the former which must, inevitably, go to the wall

## CHAPTER VI

*A lazy month in Singapore provides a lull in our travels, during which we reflect on the good fortune of those whose lot is cast there, sample the delights of Asiatic cooking, gate-crash a Chinese wedding, and wander through the streets at sunset and at night*

OUR boarding house in Singapore had once belonged to a Chinese millionaire in the great days of the rubber boom. It was a veritable palace with great spacious rooms and a fine central hall which did service as a dining-room. Our room opened directly off this hall, and was so large and lofty that the two beds, each draped in a mosquito net, looked like lonely ghosts hiding in a dark recess at one end of a drill-hall. The floor was tiled, and the furniture, though adequate, seemed dwarfed into insignificance by its surroundings. The adjoining bathroom was the essence of Spartan simplicity. Recent alterations had endowed it with a hand-basin and other offices, but there was no bath—only a shower sticking out from one of the walls, and a peculiarly Malayan institution known as a Shanghai jar, from which we ladled cold water over ourselves whenever we were tired of the monotony of the shower-bath.

The servants were all Chinese. Dressed in spotless white they padded about on bare feet all day long, attending to our every want, and reducing us to such a helpless

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pitch of dependency on them that, by the time our stay had come to an end, we had almost forgotten how to do anything for ourselves apart from dressing and eating. At any time of the day we had only to yell, "Boy", and he would be at our side in the twinkling of an eye. Every thing from buying cigarettes to posting letters could be done from the depths of an arm-chair.

Our daily routine was deliciously lazy. At seven the Boy would bring early tea and a newspaper. Breakfast would be at half past eight, and throughout the morning we would either read or write, or go into town to do some shopping, and have a gin sling at John Little's on the way.

Lunch would be at one, and afterwards we would crawl under our mosquito nets if the day was too oppressive to allow our staying awake any longer, or sit reading until tea time. After tea we would repair to the Swimming Club, and spend the remainder of the daylight alternating between swimming in the lukewarm water and sitting at the tables round its edge, drinking and gossiping with friends.

After that there might come a *pabst* party, which is the Malayan name for a cocktail party, or we might go off to eat strange food in one of the Chinese or Japanese restaurants, or go to the cinema, or to one of the native amusement parks, or return home for dinner, and afterwards sit talking with our fellow boarders. And last of all we crawled under the mosquito nets once again to sleep through the hot night with only a sheet to cover us.

It was an idyllic existence, so completely divorced from all the actualities of life that we seemed to float through it as through a dream. Even now, over two years after, it

requires only the faintest of hints—the mention of Singapore, the sight of a Malayan stamp on an envelope, or just laughter echoing over the water of a swimming pool—to bring it all back again, and set us longing for something that scarcely seems to belong to this world—the warm clasp of the tropics coupled with the freedom and ease which is the hall-mark of life as it is lived in Singapore.

But we were visitors; we merely sipped for a fleeting moment at this fountain of good living. How does it strike those whose life and work is there? Does it stale? Does all its loveliness fade at the touch of familiarity? Superficially one might almost think that it did, for the chief topic of conversation among those who live there seems to be memories of their last leave, or plans for their next. It is not good to live always in the Garden of Eden, tormented by memories of the hard, but exciting world outside. The placid life is suitable for a time, but its disadvantage lies in its monotony as contrasted with the rich variety that lies beyond. Those reared in the West have little patience with the East. The townsman finds the country hard to bear. To remain in love with Singapore must call for a quality which is growing rarer in our hustling West, the ability to be at peace with oneself, and to accept eagerly whatever life may chance to offer. Few people could make their home there, and be perfectly content; but, equally, there are few who can fall so out of love with it that they long to get away and never return.

Its tragedy is its headiness. Like good wine, it leads to coarser pleasures. Singapore—all Malaya for that matter—contains many who have been unable to withstand its temptations, and whose lives hold nothing but drinking



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and dancing and moral decadence Women are the worst offenders Men have their work, but women are denied even the prerogative of keeping house, and are all the more easily led into a life so empty, although so full, that it gives them nothing in exchange for all they put into it Bridge or Mah Jong in the morning, lunch parties, sleeping in the afternoon, drinks, dancing and whoopee into the early hours of the morning It is all so pathetically pointless and degrading, this search after a "good time", that one wonders by what mysterious alchemy of thought man hopes to turn the dross of excitement into the precious metal of happiness

But it is a small minority that spoils Singapore in this way For the most part people accept it gratefully, and live as they would do at home, though gleanng more of permanent value from the richness of its peace and quiet

Naturally life in the tropics differs from life at home, but it is more in atmosphere than in outward manifestations that Singapore provides a unique environment for living

The white man's life there is an easy one He need not struggle in crowded buses to get to his work in the morning, he need not bolt his lunch in a stuffy, smoky restaurant, he has always plenty of servants at hand to do his bidding, he need not trouble himself with mundane money matters, for his salary is good, and, provided that he is not flamboyant in his mode of living, amply sufficient for all his wants, he need not even carry money about with him, for in shop, restaurant and club his signature suffices He has his own car and driver, returns home for his lunch each day, signs cheques at the end of every month, and, in general, encounters none of the

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minor aggravations which, taken together, absorb so much time in the West, and add so greatly to the worries of life.

Add to that the fact that the climate, though hot and monotonous, allows one far greater freedom than the perpetual uncertainty of English weather, and it will be easy to see that Singapore has multifold attractions, and provides ideal conditions for living life to the full.

That it is out of touch with the rest of the world, that it is devoid of theatres and lacks the glamour of Piccadilly Circus, that those whose lot is cast there are exiles from their own homeland, are all facts of minor importance compared to what I have already said. The tragedy is that so many fail to see the loveliness of it all, and are led by that modern will-o'-the-wisp, "a good time", to abandon it for the dull Western routine of endless artificiality.

One of the joys of the East is the food. Eastern dishes and Eastern methods of cooking have very little in common with the accustomed gastronomic conventions of the West. They strike an unaccustomed note on the Western palate, a note which is all the more welcome in this world where the axiom, "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*," is daily becoming more correct.

*Sati* is a Malayan dish of great popularity. The *sati* man occupies about the same position of esteem as the ice-cream man in England on a hot summer afternoon. When he sets up his stall at the edge of the pavement, and sets about preparing his *chez d'oeuvre*, crowds begin to flock around him. Even Europeans come to him, and squat down on the edge of the pavement to partake of the delicacy. More usually, however, the *sati* man comes to

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them to provide a *sati* party on the garden lawn, and it is only the straggling remnants of dance- or cinema parties who go to him

The equipment of the *sati* man consists of a charcoal brazier, two or three bowls, a couple of plates and an unlimited quantity of short bamboo sticks. In the bowls he has chili sauces of varying intensity, and one of the plates is piled high with slices of cucumber. The foundation of *sati* is chicken (though sometimes it is mutton or beef), and thus he cuts into thin strips, each of which he threads on to a bamboo stick. When he has a handful of these ready he proceeds to cook them by holding them over the brazier, sometimes fanning the flame with his free hand, and sometimes dripping coconut milk over the cooking meat. When one handful has been finished he places them on a plate, and there is a wild rush for them. The correct method of eating them is to take the bamboo stick in one hand, and dip the end with the meat on it into one of the bowls of chili sauce. Then you pull the meat off the stick with your teeth. Fresh from the hands of the cook it is delicious, and the hot chili sauce gives it an added piquancy. In all probability the unfortunate European will find it too hot, especially if he has chosen the bowl containing the strongest sauce, but that is where the sliced cucumber comes in. As he draws the stick, minus the meat, out of his mouth, he spears a piece of cucumber with it, and proceeds to crunch it as quickly as possible. The effect is magical, it is like applying salve to a burn. The rasp of the chili melts away leaving only the delicious flavour behind. It is worth while sampling the strongest sauce just for the delicious relief which follows its bite.

One's first taste of Japanese *sukiyaki* is also an epoch-making experience. One evening we drove out to a small Japanese restaurant on the banks of the Johore Straits, and, with some difficulty, explained that we wanted a meal. After waiting some time while the ingredients were being prepared we were led into a large bare room, at the entrance to which we were asked to take off our shoes, it not being considered decent etiquette to wear them indoors. The floor was covered with rush mats, and a few prints hung on the walls; otherwise there was no sign of furniture beyond two small tables less than a foot high. In the centre of the table nearest us there was a large round hole through which were leaping yellow flames from a brazier beneath. Round the other table lay four flat cushions, one for each of our party, and on these we squatted cross-legged to await developments.

The ingredients of the *sukiyaki* began to arrive. First, a large plate covered with strips of raw chicken. Second, a perfectly huge platter covered with half a dozen kinds of raw vegetables. Third, another plate containing sliced raw onions. Fourth, a variety of small dishes containing different sauces. Finally, a large frying-pan containing several lumps of butter which was placed on top of the brazier while a petite little Japanese woman squatted down in front of it, and set herself to the task of cooking. As she busied herself with the various ingredients, now putting a little of this into the pan, and now a little of that, now adding a sprinkling of this or the other sauce, another little lady proceeded to set our table. Each of us was provided with a small blue and white plate, a small blue and white bowl—both made of the most exquisite china—and a long-shaped parcel done up in tissue paper.

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This last contained a toothpick, a paper serviette and a piece of wood some eight inches long which was split down the middle. It puzzled us a little until one of us discovered that it divided easily into two, and became a pair of chopsticks! We were provided with nothing else to help us through the meal.

Meanwhile the *sukiyaki* was cooking, sizzling delightfully, and giving off a most tempting smell. At last it was ready. The little cook got up and collected our plates, and then piled onto each as much of the different eatables as it would hold. We stuck our chopsticks between our fingers, furtively trying to copy her, and set to. It was difficult at first, but we soon got into the way of it, and, even when our bowls were filled with flaky rice, we found that by dint of careful manipulation we could get more into our mouths than we spilt on the table.

It was delicious. The food was just lightly fried, but it was burning hot, and was blessed with an exquisite flavour. There was the chicken and the onions, and also sliced cabbage, sliced mushrooms, tender bamboo shoots, vegetables which tasted a little like leeks but were rather sweeter, and a number of other things that we could not recognize. We gobbled away at it, the little cook beaming all over her face when she saw that we approved, and no sooner had we finished one plateful than she piled it up again for us to set to once more. It was not till she was doing it for the fourth time that we begged her to halt.

We finished off the meal with a glass of *saki*, a spirit distilled from rice, and taken hot. It was brought round to us in a small china vase about six inches high round which were ranged four tiny, handleless china cups. We

were each given one of these, and then the little lady came round to fill them for us. I held out mine in my right hand, but she drew back as though offended. Carefully I took it between the finger and thumb of each hand, and held it up as a suppliant would an offering to a god, whereupon she beamed, and filled it at once. As a drink it was not unpleasant, although rather bitter. It has a reputation for being rather potent, but I succeeded in taking two cups of it without suffering any visible deleterious result.

All this time we had been squatting at the table with nothing behind us on which to rest our backs, and we were beginning to feel the exhausting effects of overeating in such an unaccustomed attitude. We pulled our cushions over to the wall, and propped ourselves up against it, feeling perfectly at peace with the world.

Our first experience of Chinese food was not so pleasant; in fact we had to pay a visit to the Club afterwards to get a real meal, but by good luck, though the food was not to our taste, we stumbled on a Chinese wedding reception which was being held in the hotel. It was a Chinese hotel, of which there are several in Singapore, and seemed to be fairly Western in its appointments. Its most significant difference was the absence of a lounge. The Chinese sexes still do not mix in public, and the normal social appointments of a European hotel do not apply to them.

The restaurant was on the roof, and so we travelled up to it in a very modern lift together with some dozen Chinamen all decked out in spotless white ducks. When we reached it we found it practically full, and it was only with difficulty that we secured an empty table in a corner.

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At the time we did not realize that we were gatecrashing, but I do not think that our presence was resented, for, however unjustly, Europeans occupy a position of great prestige among all the races of Malaya, and their presence is always looked upon as a mark of signal favour

At any rate, while we were still waiting for our dinner an old Chinese lady came across to us, and explained in pidgin English that a wedding reception was being held, that she was a very great friend of the bride's mother, and that the bride would be greatly honoured if the two ladies in our party would pay her a visit. The two ladies of our party were equally honoured, and were hustled away into a small room at the far end of the roof garden, where they were introduced to the bride, a beautiful, fragile little thing, dressed in a lovely costume of emerald green. She bowed to them ceremoniously three times, and then handed each of them a small cup of tea, in which they drank her health. The groom was then brought in from an adjoining room, where, according to the custom, he was eating his dinner alone, with his father and most intimate male friends. He was a tall, slim young man dressed in faultless evening clothes. He shook hands with his two unexpected guests, bowed formally to them, and then retired once more to the fitting male atmosphere.

Meanwhile, the two of us who had been left behind were struggling with the menu and with the Chinese waiter who spoke no English and scarcely any Malay, and had at last succeeded in persuading him to bring us four portions of *shark's fin soup*. By the time Nora and her friend had returned it was waiting on the table. What a disappointment! It was a lukewarm gelatinous

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mess, which looked exactly like uncooked white of egg with shreds of what I suppose was shark's fin floating in it. We all stared at it despairingly, and each tried a mouthful. About a quarter of an hour later we persuaded the waiter to take the horrid thing away, and bring us instead a dish of what was described as mushrooms and prawns.

We passed the interval in watching the festivities. The guests were all men; again this was according to custom, for China is nothing if not a man's country, and on important occasions, such as a marriage, it is the men who feast, while the women remain demurely at home. At one end of the room a Chinese orchestra strummed away on an incredible variety of instruments, and produced a perfect bedlam of noise. Out in the street someone was honouring the occasion by letting off fire-crackers in a manner which seemed to bring Chicago dangerously near. A variety of foods covered the tables, and all the guests were making very merry. Anyone who maintains that the Chinese are impassive at all times ought to have been there to listen to the noise of laughter and shouting, and to watch the fatter, and therefore more virtuous, old gentlemen double themselves up on hearing a good story. Only the bride and bridegroom were missing, but they were due to appear shortly.

They arrived at the same time as our prawns and mushrooms, but the latter were so smothered in oil and fat that we could not make much of them, especially with chopsticks, and we were able to give our full attention to the ceremonies. I ought to make it clear that this was not the wedding. That had taken place on the previous day. This was the second of the dinner parties given to celebrate it,



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and the happy couple, who were probably longing for the peace and quiet of domesticity, were merely in the position of hosts, exactly as at a wedding reception in our own country.

☞ Their manner of acting the host was different, however. They did not come together, but separately, the groom appearing first accompanied by his parents. In one hand he carried a bottle of brandy, and in the other a glass. At each table he stopped, and filled each guest's glass from the bottle. The guests at that table then rose to drink his health, which they did in a vigorous manner by emptying the whole glassful down their throats, turning it upside down at the end to show that not a drop was left, and some of them crying, "Yam seng", which is, I was told, the Chinese equivalent of "Bottoms up". The groom responded by taking a sip from his own glass, and then filled up the guests' glasses again before passing on to the next table. Needless to say he was continually being provided with a fresh bottle.

After he had visited about half the tables his bride appeared, escorted by her mother, and proceeded to make her round of the tables. Her progress, however, was more decorous, more in keeping with the humble position which women are supposed to occupy. Never once did she raise her eyes from the ground, not even as she served each of the guests with the ceremonial cup of tea, presenting it to them, according to custom with both hands, not even as she made her three ceremonial bows to each table. In return the guests never even looked at her, taking their tea exactly as though it had been handed to them by a waitress, and continuing their conversation as though the bride was not there. Presumably it was not

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good manners to look at her, for the Chinese are sticklers for etiquette.

When they had finished their rounds the bride and groom disappeared again, and the fun began to wax fast and furious as empty glasses were filled, and the cry, "Yam seng", was heard with ever-recurring frequency. Whether they were to come back or not we could not tell, as our lady interpreter had disappeared also. We waited for a little, but they still remained in seclusion, and as we were steadily getting hungrier and hungrier we made our way to the Swimming Club, where we regaled ourselves on good Christian ham sandwiches and beer.

No account of Singapore would be complete without some mention of the night scene, for it is then, after the sun has set and all the bright, tropical shades accompanying its setting have faded into the dusk, that the true Eastern quality of the city comes to life.

Imagine the waterfront just a few minutes before sunset. The sun is sinking at an oblique angle, and the shadows of the palm trees and the casuarina trees sweep in long, slanting lines across the roadway. Men and women of almost every Asiatic nationality are walking up and down, while on the grass fringe which separates the road from the water are clustered small groups of Malays, squatting on their hunkers in circles, and engaged in their everlasting gambling. As the sun disappears the air becomes perceptibly cooler, although the shade temperature scarcely drops, and the crowds of evening strollers become greater. Rickshaws twist in and out among the people, and now and again there comes a very ancient motor-car, crammed full with an immense

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Chinese family, who seem to have been pressed in and to be on the point of overflowing into the road

If there are any clouds in the sky they are tinged with the richest colourings, and reflect something of their glory on to the dull earth, touching it with a strange light which seems to be suffused through the atmosphere, not from any particular object, but from some internal and invisible source. It tinges everything, the leaves of the trees, the smooth surface of the road, the clothes and faces of the passers by, and makes every object seem to glow of its own accord.

But this miracle does not last long. The sun sinks quickly, and the colours fade from the clouds. In place of the brightness comes a calm, peaceful blue which envelops all the distance, and gradually deepens as the night approaches. At one moment it is exactly the colour one always associates with Copenhagen pottery. The sea itself, the vast myriad of ships resting on it, the guardian islands faint in the distance, and then the cloud flecked sky, they all appear in different shades of that same quiet grey blue. Lights spring out on shipboard and along the waterfront, the forms of trees grow darker, and appear in silhouette against the sky, the scent of the flowers grows stronger, and, before one can quite realize the miracle of transformation, night has come, and daylight has vanished till the coming of the dawn.

To walk through the streets at night after all the hustle of daytime activity has passed is an experience, uncanny and almost frightening, for with the absence of daylight's familiarity the town assumes a quality of strangeness which has nothing in common with the night time appearance of Western cities.

The street-lamps are few and far between, and not sufficiently bright to light up more than what lies in their immediate vicinity. There is a quietness too which those who are accustomed to a busy night-life find hard to understand. It is as though the whole town is brooding in the fitful light, and only awaiting a suitable moment to rise and shatter the peace. In the distance white-clad figures suddenly slip out of the gloom into the light cast by one of the lamps, or streaming out from an open window, moving as silently as cats if they are barefooted, or causing a clattering, shuffling noise if they are wearing the wooden sandals so popular in the East. In general, however, there are few people to be seen. Here and there some sit on the roadside, dangling their legs over the deep, open drains, and in front of some of the shops and warehouses night-watchmen lie sound asleep on their improvised beds. The only people to make any noise are the Tamils. Everywhere in Malaya, it seems, Tamils make a noise at night, for they are fond of conversation at all times, and their voices are raucous and harsh. However friendly they may be it always sounds as though they were on the point of flying at each other's throats. You can hear them in the distance, a good hundred yards away, disputing, so it seems, with the energy of a Socrates. As you come nearer their voices grow in volume, and as you leave them behind, the sound of their argument—if argument it is—is carried to you over the still air, fainter and fainter until at last only the high notes reach you like faint echoes of some distant Parliamentary debate.

There are other noises too, but they are quieter. Music seems to be everywhere. It comes stealing out of open

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windows and doorways, now the thin piping of a native flute, now the clash and clatter of a Chinese gramophone record, now the wailing of a one-stringed fiddle. It comes quickly, and dies away again as you pass on, as though stifled by its surroundings.

But night life, as we know it, has not been exiled entirely from the city. There are two amusement gardens, The Great World and The New World, where, until the sober hour of midnight, the native people can enjoy themselves to the full, playing "games of skill", watching open-air theatres where not only translations of English plays are performed, but also the traditional dramas of China, India and Japan, or dancing with the "taxi girls" in the open air.

These are the pleasures of the wealthier Asiatics, of those whose economic position allows them to grow more Western every day. For the poorer ones it is a matter of sitting in the streets with their legs dangling over a drain, or of making music in their own hovels. And such is the magic of Malaya that it is they who seem to have the better time.

## CHAPTER VII

### *We find adventure in the China Seas*

WE had intended to sail from Singapore to Calcutta, but as we would have arrived there in the middle of the notorious hot weather we decided instead to take a flying trip to China. It is astonishing how, after travelling for a time, distance seems to lose all its power of deterrence. A few thousand miles one way or the other, what does it matter?

We booked a passage on a small Dutch ship, *S.S. Barentz*, and spent many delightful days on board her, steaming lazily up and down the China seas, watching the flying-fish by day and the phosphorous by night, sipping Dutch gin as the disappearing sun set all the sea on fire, and listening to the seamen's tales of the Captain and his officers.

Of Hong Kong and Shanghai, of Manila in the Philippines and of Saigon in French Indo-China I propose to say nothing here. We only touched at them, spending maybe only a few hours, maybe only a couple of days, and gathering nothing beyond a few tourists' impressions. It all passed off as a delightfully lazy dream, broken here and there with a few moments of activity, but recommenced again as soon as the ship cast off her mooring-ropes.

But there was one experience which it would be a pity

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to pass over. The China Seas have an unenviable reputation at a certain season of the year, and it happened to be just in the middle of this season that we sailed across them. On the journey north to Shanghai we hoped vainly for a typhoon, for calm seas can become monotonous, and we were good enough sailors to enjoy a tossing. But the journey was uneventful. However, when the time came for leaving Shanghai we were held up for twelve hours by a typhoon which was raging somewhere near the river mouth, and when we did sail we were just in time to escape a second. We thought that our chances of actually experiencing one had died away by that time, but we were mistaken.

We were four days out of Shanghai, sailing down the east coast of the Philippines when it happened. The weather could not have been better, it was the normal July calm of the north tropic seas—blue skies set with billowing mountains of cloud, occasional rainstorms which came with the sudden sharp intensity of a thunder-clap, and a softly rolling blue sea which, under the influence of a gentle breeze, threw back the light of the sun in a hundred thousand glittering diamonds.

When the Chief Officer took over the watch at four o'clock on the morning of our fourth day out he sensed vaguely that something was wrong. It was instinct rather than deduction that instinct which a life at sea slowly breeds into a man. There was nothing definite to support his fears. The glass was steady, the sky starlit, the water calm as it had been throughout the voyage. Yet there was that impending premonition of danger which Nature always broadcasts to finely attuned minds.

As the morning slowly lengthened out, and dawn

brought with it a view of clouds banking up on the horizon the Chief Officer grew more certain. The Captain was awakened, and called on to the bridge. He recognized the warnings instantly. What it was, from what direction or at what time it would come he could not say. He only knew that something was coming sometime in the day; Nature had said it as plainly as though she had written it in letters of fire across the sky.

We passengers awoke to a new kind of weather. A strong wind was whipping up from behind us, and the sky was overcast with a thick drapery of leaden cloud. The water was no longer the smiling blue of previous days; it was grey and sullen, flecked with particles of white foam which the wind whipped up into the air with savage intensity. There were no big waves, and the ship was riding easily for all her empty holds. In our innocence we took it merely for a more severe rainstorm than we had hitherto experienced.

On our way to the saloon for breakfast I noticed that the glass had fallen a point. There was nothing in that—it rarely stayed steady throughout a whole night—and it was still pointing to Variable, as it had done throughout all our good weather. I set it again, and we joined the other passengers for breakfast. The Chief Engineer was there. "It is nothing," he replied to our questions, "just a rainstorm"; but the hasty way in which he bolted the last of his breakfast and hurried up onto the bridge gave the lie to his assurance. So did the activities of the Javanese sailors whom we could see through the saloon windows tying up all the loose gear, covering the witless loudspeaker with a tarpaulin and binding it securely to the rail, and performing other little jobs of a similar



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nature The Chinese stewards, too, seemed anxious to get the table cleared, and so we hurried through our meal

Back in the lounge we found with something of a shock that the glass had dropped a whole five points in ten minutes It was now pointing to Rain We all clustered round it to watch for the next development It was not long in happening The needle began to dip and rise again in an irresponsible, drunken fashion, as though the instrument was fumbling vaguely to discover Nature's intentions It would drop as much as two or three points in as many seconds, and then slowly rise, only to drop again, but it never quite rose to the point from which it had fallen, and every time it dropped it reached a little further down the scale We all stood watching it, fascinated by that relentless downward trend It was as though Nature was steadily drawing in her breath, preparing for one single, conclusive and destructive blow

It was just a matter of minutes till the needle, at its lowest dip, was pointing directly at Stormy We were no longer in two minds as to what was coming Nor did we have to wait long for it to arrive Without warning the wind suddenly veered round to port, and, with an impact like the blow of a sledge hammer, sent the ship reeling over to starboard Furniture and passengers, except those of us who were lucky enough to be near a steadying handrail, went shooting across the lounge, to end up in a corner in a veritable chaos of arms and legs, chairs, tables, books, newspapers, ash trays, glasses and broken vases

We had been struck by a typhoon

Outside the wind raged with an ever-increasing fury, picking up the chairs and tables on deck, and hurling them against the walls of the superstructure, smashing them to matchwood with the ease of a powerful pulping machine. The noise was deafening, and, what with the sudden shock and the efforts we had to make to keep our feet on the sloping and heaving floor, the whole situation seemed to partake of the nature of a grotesque and fantastic nightmare. Though all the doors and windows had been securely shut this precaution proved of little avail. The force of the wind drove the rain and spray through every tiny crack with such power that the frame of every door and window spouted twenty or thirty small jets of water into our midst. In a few minutes everything in the lounge, including ourselves, was sopping wet.

The gale lasted for about a quarter of an hour, and was followed by a sudden calm. The ship righted herself, and rode easily over the heavy sea which remained, while the din of the tearing wind was followed by a silence so profound as to be even more deafening in its intensity. We opened the windows, and looked out. Beneath us, though a heavy sea was still rolling, the surface of the water was as calm, as unruffled as in one of the sea's least petulant moods, and, though the sky above was thickly overcast with slowly writhing clouds, the water's colour was that deep, translucent blue which belongs more properly to a cloudless day. On every side the horizon was draped in mist, but where we were there was neither wind nor rain. We were in the dead calm which lies in the centre of a typhoon. All around us a gigantic whirlwind was raging, rushing on its way up to the

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steppes of Central Asia, but for the moment we were as safe as on an inland lake

Having found our way in, we still had to find our way out. The ship headed east under slow speed, and the clouds in that direction came slowly nearer. There were only two other passengers, and the four of us were standing on the upper deck when the wind struck us again, and we had just time to slip into a nearby cabin before it was once more raging with its full force. It came from the starboard bow this time, and, as the cabin's door opened towards the ship's stern, we were able to leave it open until the storm had reached the apex of its fury. The driving rain and spray made it all but impossible to see further than a few yards, but that was sufficient. Chairs and heavy wooden settees, which had lain on the sheltered side of the ship during the first half of the typhoon, came whirling into view, and either smashed themselves to matchwood against the davits of the life boats, or raced out of sight down the alleyway before us. If the din had been deafening in the lounge it was ten times worse in our new quarters. We had to stick our fingers in our ears to shut it out. It was beyond all the powers of imagination or description, a shrieking, thundering uproar interspersed with continual cracks and wrenchings which signalized the relentless destruction of the ship's fittings.

This bout lasted longer than the first. For a full three quarters of an hour the storm raged in all its fury, while we did what we could to make ourselves comfortable in the tiny cabin where the floor was awash with several inches of water, and the bunks sodden through and through. At last the wind dropped somewhat, but we

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did not dare to venture out until the the Chief Officer appeared to tell us that the deck was now comparatively safe.

It would not be exaggerating to say that we thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The discomforts were a part of the fun. But we had merely been the spectators; the ship's officers and crew had been the actors, and they took a very different view of what we had been through. The modern faith in the machine is almost akin to religious faith. It gives ordinary non-mechanics complete confidence in the machine age which even a typhoon experienced at close quarters cannot shake. Had we been in a sailing ship I doubt if we would have retained our pleasant state of detached enjoyment; but, being in a ship driven by steam which could defy the winds, we felt no urge to worry, and were pleasantly able to take in all that was going on around us.

But the officers knew just what a typhoon can do to even the strongest ships, and they knew also that the responsibility was theirs. What to us had been an exciting interlude was to them an intensely dangerous situation in which both life and property depended on their ability to keep cool heads, and control the movements of their ship in the face of all the furies of Nature. When the Chief Officer came to our cabin he was very different from the anxious sailor we had glimpsed giving orders to the crew during the lull. He was soaked to the skin, and his curly fair hair was matted down over his brow. But his cheery, weather-beaten features were alight with the joy of having successfully come through one of the greatest dangers of the sea with, as we discovered later, only one of the crew having suffered, and that only a broken arm.

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He was like a boy in his delight, and his chief concern was that I should get my camera, and take some pictures of the wreckage

Wreckage there certainly was Canvas awnings had been torn to ribbons, chairs, tables and even doors lay about in fragments, the combined wood and canvas awning over the bridge had been completely destroyed, the covers of the life boats had been blown away, ropes and steel hawsers had been snapped like pieces of string, the flagpole at the stern had been broken in two, the paint had been knocked off much of the superstructure It was a scene of utter desolation Worst of all, from the foremast a length of wire trailed away in what was left of the wind—the broken wireless aerial Nature had cut us off completely from the rest of the world

However, our isolation did not last for long While Captain, officers and passengers gathered on the bridge to drink to our successful escape (and the Captain's hand shook so badly as he poured it out that Neptune received a fair libation) the damage to the wireless was already being repaired, and before an hour had passed the news of the typhoon was being flashed to the nearest weather authorities, to be rebroadcast by them to all other shipping in the vicinity The freemasonry of the sea demanded that this should be the first task to be attended to

The rest of the day passed in an atmosphere of dismal anti-climax Everything was soaking, cabins were uninhabitable, in the lounge tables and chairs were strewn about in disorder Though the task of partial re-organization was carried out in a remarkably short space of time, considering all that had to be done, we had to spend several hours in a condition that made us feel far more

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unhappy than we had done while the typhoon was actually raging. Yet I am sure that there was not one of us (I speak for the passengers) who would willingly have missed that morning's experience, or who counted the price of discomfort we were paying as excessive for the exciting memories it had bought.

## CHAPTER VIII

*We come to the land of waterways and Buddhist Shrines,  
and discover an Eastern kingdom where the White Man  
does not rule*

OUR arrival at Bangkok was not calculated to give us an initial good impression. The water round the coast is very shallow, so that the *Barentz*, though of less than 5,000 tons, could not approach it. We were unloaded into a small tug some thirty miles from the river mouth at the unearthly hour of five in the morning.

It was raining, and the sea was choppy. We could see nothing but mist all round us. We sat on chairs, and yawned our heads off for a solid three hours. Then, at last, the coast came into view, and about three quarters of an hour later we were set ashore at a small broken-down jetty dignified with the name of Packnam. The tug could have carried us right up to Bangkok, but it was a long journey by water, and there was supposed to be a train service which would carry us up more quickly.

Unfortunately there was no train there to greet us, and it was not until after the tug had gone on its way that we discovered that there would not be another for half an hour. In any normal country the reasonable thing to have done would have been to hire a car, for Bangkok was only fifteen miles away, but Siam is not a normal country.

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by our standards. There were no cars in Packnam for the very simple reason that there was no road connecting it with the city, even though it was the principle port of the town. But of that I shall have more to say later.

The station was not a pleasant place in which to have to wait. It was only a long shed, and did not even boast any seats on which we could rest. What it lacked in appointments, however, it made up in the number of people who came to stare at us, and beg of us. A crowd began to collect almost as soon as we arrived, and we were soon surrounded by twenty or thirty gapers who considered us in a ruminative fashion, chewing betel-nut, and occasionally spitting out blood-red streams of juice on to what passed for a platform.

It was not a pleasant experience. The Siamese are not a beautiful race; nor are they a cleanly one. Their features are flat and wooden, and their bodies lumpy and ungraceful. Men and women alike wear a *dboti*, a kind of loose *sarong* which is pulled up between the legs so as to form a pair of loose, flapping trousers, and as many of the women crop their hair it is sometimes difficult to tell to what sex they belong. We had become so used to the cheery, virile appearance of the Malays, dressed up in their bright colours, that there was something infinitely depressing about this shoddy crowd that surrounded us, an impression which was considerably deepened when a number of beggars appeared, and pressed up to us exhibiting revolting sores on their hands and legs, and appealing for alms in low, whining voices. We had not encountered a single case of begging in Malaya, and very few in the other countries we had since visited, and this



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sudden onslaught following immediately upon our arrival gave us the worst of impressions. Later, especially after we had accustomed ourselves to India, begging became one of the most important features of the social landscape, but here it was new, and appeared in such a revolting form, that we were physically nauseated, and longed only to get away from these sub human, whining animals to some quiet and unfrequented spot.

Even the arrival of the train did not raise our spirits. To call it a train at all was really going far beyond the necessary demands of politeness. It was little more than a glorified tram-car with hard, wooden seats, the first-class portion being exactly the same as the rest, but cut off by a wooden partition. The small luggage van had recently been used to carry a cargo of fish to town, and its floor and walls were thick with scales and unpleasantly smelly. We had to pay for two extra first-class seats, and pile our luggage up on them to keep it from being contaminated. When the "train" started to move it achieved a speed of twenty miles an hour with considerable difficulty, and bumped its way over the uneven track in a bone shattering manner.

The scenery was flat, and consisted of unrelieved acres of padi fields, some of them so thick with growing rice that they looked like brilliant thick piled carpets of emerald green. Temporarily they revived our wilting spirits, for they were very lovely, but the journey came to an end all too soon, and we were discharged at the Bangkok station into a second crowd of beggars and lookers-on. This time, however, escape was easy. There were roads in Bangkok, and taxis as well. We clambered into one, and were soon ensconced in a comfortable hotel.

in which all the unpleasantness we had undergone was conveniently relegated to the outside world.

The visitor who arrives in Bangkok by train and leaves Bangkok by train (I am speaking of the real train, and not the tram-car) does not realize that the city has no road communication with the outside world. Even the air-port, fifteen miles east of the city, is not connected to it by a road, and those who arrive by air must complete their journey on the tram as we had done. Actually a road out to the air-port is now in the course of construction—they had been working on it for five years when we were there—but it is not scheduled for completion for some time to come. Roads to more distant parts have not yet been considered, or, at any rate, have not yet succeeded in escaping from the brains of those in authority.

And yet Bangkok is a large commercial city, capital of the Kingdom of Siam, seat of Embassies from all the countries of the world. Within the small area of the city itself roads are numerous, if not of a very high standard, and motor cars and taxis are almost as common as rick-shaws. This, however, is a novelty due largely to a sudden infiltration of western ideas during the last few years. Half a century ago Bangkok was as innocent of roads as the Malayan jungle.

The reason is simple enough. There was no need for roads. The country was as flat as a calm sea, and the favourite form of communication—the only form of communication—was by water. Hundreds of canals wound their way through the town and its surroundings, and the broad Menam River was the main thoroughfare into the interior. In the modern part of the city the canals

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still remain, though they are not greatly used, but elsewhere they outnumber the roads, and bear a heavy traffic of small dug-outs and sampans in which the natives make their way from one house to another

On the west bank of the river in Old Bangkok, the original site of the city, there are still practically no roads at all. Early one morning we hired a motor boat, and set out to explore it by water. The river was crowded with small craft, and the problem of crossing it was made all the more difficult by the fact that it had been swollen by heavy rains, and was carrying down great masses of torn up branches and weeds. Some of these tangled patches were as much as twenty feet square, and as they followed close on one another it was not too easy to pass between them without fouling our screw, but eventually we reached the other side, and, after following the bank for about a mile, cut inland along a *klong*, or canal, which must have been at least fifty yards wide. It was the "Main Street" of Old Bangkok. As we progressed it became narrower, and the scene on either side grew more and more picturesque. Small wooden houses stood along either bank, each raised high above the water line on wooden stilts. Before each of them there was a small platform on which the families were gathered to undergo their morning toilet. This consisted of jumping in and out of the *klong*, or, in some more sophisticated households, in drawing up buckets of water to pour over themselves. It was not a very savoury business, for the canal was used as a drain as well as a wash house, and also as a cuspidor for the residue of betel nut chewing. On one occasion we saw the body of a dead dog lying on the mud at the edge. However, that acted as no deterrent,

which possibly explains why it is that Bangkok is renowned for its epidemics of typhoid, cholera and other unpleasant tropical diseases.

There were hundreds of children about, all of them stark naked, boys and girls alike. They all seemed to be thoroughly pleased with life, as children should, and grinned and waved to us, being delighted beyond measure if their salutations were returned. We had only to smile at a little boy or girl and he or she would rush into the house to tell the grown-ups all about it.

Nearly all these people were pure Siamese, but here and there we would come to a small hut which was filled with goods for sale. Invariably the people sitting outside it were Chinese.

About three miles up this *klong* we came to the market-place of Old Bangkok. As was only to be expected the market took place upon the water, and not on dry land. The Siamese are almost an amphibious race, and seem to be far more at home sitting in a dug-out than standing on their feet. Each of the houses we passed had a boat of sorts drawn up beneath it, no matter how poor its owners seemed to be (it was rather like motor-cars in America), and during the whole of our trip our steersman had to be constantly on the alert to thread his way over the crowded water without an accident.

As we came closer to the market the volume of small craft became so much greater that we had to shut off our engine and drift slowly along amongst them, helping ourselves on our way by using a paddle as a punt-pole. All Bangkok seemed to have taken to the *klong*. Hundreds of small boats jostled each other in a manner that would have made Henley, during the Regatta, seem almost un-

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frequented Most of the sampans were laden with goods for sale—or, rather, for exchange, for money is very little used in this part of the world Some contained hundreds of wads of betel nut, prepared ready for chewing, others vegetables, others rice, or fruit, or evil smelling duriens One or two enterprising Chinamen had come out with urns of steaming coffee, and were doing a brisk trade

Most of the people were in Siamese dress, and all the women wore hats of the Siamese straw which is so exclusive and expensive in London Town These hats were admirably designed to keep off the heat of the sun The inner part fitted closely over the skull, but there was also an outer part which came down over the inner part like a second hat, and which was a good two and a half feet broad Wearing one was like carrying a parasol on one's head

There was not as much colour in the scene as there would have been had it been cast in Malaya, for the Siamese seem to have no instinct for gaiety They prefer the darker colours, and many of them dress in pure black In spite of that, however, the scene was far more picturesque than anything Malaya had to offer, simply because it was far more Oriental These people were untouched by the West They were living as they had lived for hundreds of years, and marketing their goods just as had been their custom long before the white man first made his appearance in Siam The dirt, filth and smells which surrounded us were an earnest of the fact that times had not greatly changed The cleanliness of Malaya is unnatural at bottom, however pleasant it may be to European eyes and noses, but the dirt of Siam is the very essence of Eastern life These Siamese were all happy

They laughed and shouted to each other from sampan to sampan, quite oblivious of their own or the surrounding dirt. For us it was a lesson in comparisons.

Old Bangkok has nothing in common with the modern city, where half the population is Chinese or Japanese, and where, ever since the Revolution of 1932, westernization is making gigantic strides. Up till then Siam had been an Oriental backwater, ruled by an absolute monarch, and influenced only very slightly by the European concessionaires who came to buy its rice and work its great forests of teak. The Revolution was a direct result of contact with the West all the same. Having been provided with a Western education the reigning monarch had fallen into the heresy of doubting his own divinity, and, as was only natural, that heresy succeeded in communicating itself to his people, thus giving an opportunity to the rising industrial class of setting up a form of government more sympathetic to their aspirations. To-day the absolute monarchy has degenerated into a constitutional monarchy with an impotent boy-king occupying the honourable position of national figure-head. The real rulers of the country are a new-born set of Siamese business men who are anxious to see their country developed on sound modernistic lines. Democracy of a sort—a democracy which allows all enemies of the regime to be kept under protective arrest—has been established, and education is proceeding apace. One has only to glance at the station bookstall to see what great strides in literacy have been achieved. It is full of Siamese translations of paper novelettes, lusciously decorated with erotic pictures.

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So well has the Siamese adventure into commerce developed that European traders are beginning to feel the pinch. Where they once had a monopoly they now find that they are subject to competition, and there are threats of concessions not being renewed when the present leases run out. For the moment, however, affairs have not yet reached a climax, and the small European community leads a pleasant, satisfactory life, such as is common all over the tropics.

Yet their position is not the same as it is in Malaya. They are not the rulers of the country, they are not officials with the power of governing, they are as much aliens as are the English in France, or Spaniards in Germany, and although by virtue of their white skins they enjoy a certain prestige they have to submit to laws made by the people of the country. Moreover, there is no majority of any one European nation, as is the case in most European colonies. They come from all the countries of Europe, and so do not have the common social background that, in a colony, tends to increase the differentiation between the races.

The colour question scarcely arises. The Club's name is prefixed by the epithet, "Royal", and His Majesty the King of Siam is its chief patron. Naturally it is open both to Europeans and to Siamese, and there is full social intercourse between the two races. Intermarriage is frequent, and carries no hint of stigma with it. In this respect the difference from Malaya is extreme, and illustrates how artificial the whole structure of colour antagonism really is.

The life led by the European does not possess the same intoxicating quality as in Singapore, chiefly because the

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environment is so unpleasant. Bangkok is a dirty city at the best, and its appointments are unimpressive. It has few fine buildings—discounting for the moment its more attractive temples—and it makes small provision for entertainment. Apart from the Club and the two hotels there are no restaurants worth mentioning. There are a couple of dance-halls, one of which is scarcely deserving of a respectable reputation. There is one really bearable cinema. The Club is far more the centre of social life than it is in Malaya, and, since it is an international club in the fullest sense of the word, it transforms the whole of social life into a more artificial entity than is altogether pleasant. There is a stiffness and formality about it, a tendency towards the formation of national cliques, a certain atmosphere of reservation which is unavoidable so long as Europe continues to indulge in its present extremes of nationalism.

It is still very difficult to estimate what the future holds for Siam. It is doubtful if it can long retain its independence. To the west lies India; to the east China; both lands where famine is rampant at frequent intervals, and where, even in normal times, there is scarcely enough food to go round. By contrast Siam is only lightly populated, and its yield of foodstuffs far in excess of its needs. It is heavily coveted.

Then again, there are rumours of rich oil-fields in the hinterland, and Japan needs oil. Japan, too, is anxious to see a canal driven through Siamese territory on the Peninsula north of Malaya, thus cutting out the strategic importance of Singapore.

Siam occupies too many key positions to be really safe



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in a world where war and war preparedness have become the chief factors in everyday life. Hitherto it has interfered little with the Europeans who have come to settle there, but to day an incipient nationalism is surging up, and there is nothing exaggerated in the fear that it may one day find itself the cockpit of an Eastern Armageddon.

To return to Bangkok, I have already described how our arrival was greeted by a host of beggars. They form an essential part of Siamese life, for begging is an institution which receives the sanction of old-established custom, and has all the weight of religious expedience behind it.

Siam is a Buddhist country. Any Siamese will tell you that it is the one remaining country in the world where true Buddhism is practised. This is palpably untrue, for genuine Buddhism died away very nearly two thousand years ago. To day innumerable sects claim to represent the true religion, much as the different branches of the Christian Church claim for themselves a monopoly of Christianity. Nevertheless, Siam is a stronghold of what passes for Buddhism, and is influenced by the basic tenets of Buddhist morality. Of these one of the most important is the method of acquiring merit by the simple process of giving alms. The more alms one gives, the more merit one acquires, and the greater one's chance of ultimately attaining the blessed state of Nirvana. But there must be someone in need of alms, for it is obvious that the more pitious the need for charity the greater the merit.

Beggars consequently, form an integral part of the social system, and the more leprous, the more hideously

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mutilated, the more disgustedly clothed they are, the better they will serve the spiritual ambitions of the wealthier classes. This is not a perverted description of the situation. It is a perfectly true, sound and literal account of the position occupied by beggars in a Buddhist country. They are essentials in the eye of the prevailing philosophy, and if you cannot believe that the Siamese actually look on them in this light I can only refer you to those Christian clergymen who maintain with all seriousness that the backward races of the world have been so made by a wise and all-seeing God for the especial purpose of providing work for enthusiastic and self-sacrificing missionaries.

Begging, however, is met with in nearly all Eastern countries where an Eastern religion holds sway. There are aspects of Siamese Buddhism which are unique, and of these the most striking is the religious architecture. Bangkok is as full of *wats*, or temples, as Margate is of boarding houses. They are to be found down every street, some of them mean little places, but others fantastically rich in their colouring and decoration.

It is only in dress that the Siamese prefer sombre colours. Their temples are amongst the most colourful sights in the world. Bangkok is a paradise for the proud owner of a colour camera.

The best method of giving an impression of what this amounts to in actual fact is to describe one or two of the *wats*. It is impossible to generalize about them, since each one is different, and presents something new to the visitor.

The *Wat Benchamabobhit* is one of the most modern, and is the show-place to which all tourists are inevitably

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taken. It was built by the ex King for his own devotions, and is magnificently appointed. Buddhist law prescribes that every man must spend a part of his life as a monk, and it is the lot of the King to spend three years in one of the religious institutions. Usually he builds a new temple for himself.

Marble stairs lead up to the main doorway, which is itself flanked by immense marble pillars. But the walls and roof are its glory. They are all tiled in a dull golden colour which seems to absorb the sun's rays, and to glow without casting back any uncomfortable glitter. The pointed roof curves upwards at either end, tapering away into dragons' tails. It is difficult to say whether it looks lovelier in the daytime with its colouring, or at night when its outline stands out alone in black silhouette.

The shrine is small, and contains at one end a large figure of the Buddha. The beams of its openwork roof are gaily decorated in red and gold. A first glance at the walls gives the impression that they are covered with Victorian bathroom wallpaper, but a closer inspection shows that the patterns have been painted by hand, and consist of thousands of tiny representations of the Buddha. Behind the shrine there is a large courtyard surrounded by cloisters, which are lined with a series of sixty-two bronze statues of the Buddha, each showing him in a different symbolical attitude. The courtyard itself is paved with blocks of marble, and, backing on to the shrine, an immense bronze statue of the god, covered entirely with gold leaf, rises some twenty feet high.

To be able to understand one of these temples would demand an intimate knowledge of the Buddhist religion.

The visitor either likes or dislikes them, as he would an illustrated Chinese book. He cannot understand them.

Each, however, possesses its own special features. Let me describe another—the *Wat Po*. It is nearly as old as Bangkok itself, which was established over two hundred years ago when the Siamese fled south from the invading Burmese armies, and it lacks the richness of the more modern *Wat Benchamabobhit*.

We visited it one afternoon, and spent a considerable time exploring its many corners. It is an immense, rambling place filled with courtyards, shrines and tombs, figures of the Buddha and richly decorated pagodas. Unlike the other it relies for its colour and decorative effects less on tiles, though they cover most of the roofs, than on porcelain and coloured glass. Thousands of pieces of broken porcelain and coloured glass have been used in its decoration, being stuck in a cement foundation so as to form designs. From the distance they add a touch of grandeur. It is only when you come to examine them closely that they lose their beauty, and turn out to be the extreme of tawdriness.

The *Wat Po* is famous as the home of the Temple of the Reclining Buddha, which is a long, barn-like building within its walls, roofed, as usual, with coloured tiles. The Buddha lies inside. Never have I seen anything so hideous. It is a hundred and twenty-five feet long, and fills the Temple completely. The head is pressed up against one end, and it is only just possible to make one's way round the feet. Originally it was covered with gold leaf, but with the passage of time this has peeled off, and it is now merely a mass of brickwork, covered here and there with patches of plaster. In some spots a few frag-

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ments of gold still stick to it, as though it was suffering from a skin disease. It lies at full length, the head propped up on one hand, and has no beauty of line, being only a roughly shaped mass. Round the walls a set of murals once depicted the traditional phases of the life of the Buddha, but time has attacked them also, so that three quarters of the pictures have been obliterated. However, the Temple is still used, and once a year a great festival is held there. Mere outward and visible effects of the passage of time do nothing to damp Buddhist enthusiasms. It is the significance of the ritual that counts.

No account of Siamese architecture would be complete without mention of the Royal Palace where the King lives. It is the most extraordinary bastard I have ever seen, and illustrates very amusingly the conflict between East and West.

It was built when the West was first beginning to permeate Siam, and was designed by an Italian architect. No doubt he was a very good architect. If you shade your eyes so as to hide the roof of the building it has a magnificent appearance. It boasts fine marble columns, a grand staircase leading up to the entrance and large, airy windows. Alas! You have only to look at the roof for all this glory of Immortal Rome to collapse before your eyes. One cannot blame the architect, in all probability the roof was ordered by the King himself, so that the building might have something of Siam in it. It is pure Siamese, peaked like the roofs of the *nats*, and tiled in bright reds and blues. The result of the mixture is so grotesque and laughable to Western eyes that it appears more of a freak than a royal residence.

Hard by the Palace lies the most famous of all Siamese

## IN MALAYA AND SIAM

*wats*; it is certainly the most expensive. Its real name I never discovered, but *ex officio* it is known as the Wat of the Emerald Buddha, a name derived from its most precious treasure which is a figure of the Buddha some two feet high carved out of a single block of emerald. At least, it is called emerald; actually it is another stone, darker in colour and less precious, but in spite of that it must be worth a fabulous sum. It stands on the top of a twenty-foot golden pagoda, and is surrounded by other figures of the Buddha, the smaller of which are cast out of solid gold, while the larger are plated with gold leaf said to be a quarter of an inch thick. Round the base of the pagoda there is a collection of gifts which have been sent to the Temple at one time and another. Many are amusing, for what is treasured in the East is not necessarily treasured in the West. In particular there are two china angels which might have come straight from any Victorian mantelpiece. Best of all, however, is a musical clock which was presented to King Rama IV by no lesser a personage than Queen Victoria herself.

The courtyard surrounding this inner shrine is filled with smaller buildings, each of which is richly decorated and coloured, and each of the four gateways is guarded by two hideous tiled guardians, standing some twenty feet high. The cloisters are decorated with murals illustrating stories from the Hindu Mahabhrata, thus exemplifying the ancient connection between the Buddhists and the Hindus.

Taken all in all, the Wat of the Emerald Buddha is not only the richest of all the Siamese temples, but the one on which the most care and craftsmanship has been lavished. It is kept scrupulously clean, which is unusual

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and worthy of note in Bangkok, and is considered as the religious centre of the country

There are so many varied aspects of Bangkok that I have been able to touch on only a few of the most noticeable. It is still an Eastern city with only slight contact with the West, and therefore presents an entirely unfamiliar appearance. One would have to live there for years in order to understand it fully. Some points, however, spring immediately to the surface, and these I have tried to elaborate into a more or less connected account of an Eastern city which will not remain Eastern for very long.

We left Bangkok by train for Penang, and our last glimpses of Siam were more heartening than our first. The train moved swiftly over flat country as the sun was setting, and all round us lay flooded padi fields, peacefully calm in the still night air. As the sun sank below the horizon every line of colour in the sky was reflected in the fields where the rice was not too thick, while the few trees stood out clearly against the darkening sky. Far in the distance a low range of hills lifted itself in long slow slopes of azure blue, and in the small cottages dotted here and there among the fields cooking fires added ruddy specks of light to the scene. Peasants were slowly making their way home along the edge of the railway track, and crowds were collecting outside the small *vats* for the evening rites. It was infinitely peaceful and beautiful, and gave us a new conception of Siam which was utterly foreign to that which Bangkok had impressed upon us.

# FROM CALCUTTA TO PESHAWAR



## CHAPTER IX

*We arrive in the Golden Land of Hind, where we are broiled in the hot weather, and embroiled in the servant problem*

OUR ship carried us northwards from Penang. In the far distance the Andamans loomed up greyly for a few hours, but otherwise the only scenery was the slow, rolling swell of the Bay of Bengal. Cutting into this swell the bow threw clouds of sparkling spray into the air, and every now and then stirred shoals of flying fish into activity, sending them shooting off in every direction like clouds of silver bullets. For five days we lolled lazily on until on the last evening we dropped anchor near the lightship at the mouth of the Hooghli.

The pilot came out in a long-boat rowed by a dozen husky Indians. It was dark by then, but a floodlight hung over the ship's rail, and lit up their dark faces and white turbans. It was an ideal introduction to India. The long-boat rising and falling in the swell, the orders of the Indian boatswain in a tongue we could not understand, the shaft of light which illuminated the boat and its crew, leaving all outside its rays in inky blackness, a few twinkling stars above and the lapping of the water beneath; they all combined to produce an atmosphere strange, and almost mysterious, and yet terribly familiar to anyone for whom, like ourselves, the name, India, spells all the charm, wonder and mystery of the Orient.

## EASTERN JOURNEY

We weighed anchor with the dawn, and by lunchtime were steaming through the centre of Calcutta, staring alternately at the crowded jute mills on our left, or at the wide open space of the Maidan on our right. The riverway itself was crowded with shipping, not only with cargo boats come to carry off the produce of Bengal, but with innumerable tiny craft. Most of them were propelled by oars, we scarcely saw one which bore a sail. One was engaged in a religious expedition. In its centre stood a small coloured pavilion, round which sat about a dozen men and women engaged in chanting a hymn which, though cast in an unfamiliar key, sounded almost as jovial as a Salvation Army anthem. One tubby gentleman, beaming all over his face, looked as though he was singing Students' Songs. The pavilion, so we were told, contained a family god who was about to be drowned in the river as a tribute to Holy Mother Ganges, who is the paramount deity in this part of India.

We were complete strangers to India in general, and to Calcutta in particular, and felt somewhat lost as we walked down the gangway. Fortunately an Indian hotel runner was at hand, and we left to him the details of disembarkation. He produced four coolies in turbans and loin cloths, and soon we were heading a procession through the docks which made us feel as though we were on safari in Central Africa. The hotel runner led the way, we followed, behind us came our coolies strung out in a long line, each carrying a suit case on his head. Eventually we found haven in a taxi, and drove off in regal style to the accompaniment of deep salaams from the coolies who had obviously been grossly overtipped.

At the hotel we received a shock. We had just settled

## FROM CALCUTTA TO PESHAWAR

comfortably into our room when there came a knock at the door, and the runner reappeared bringing with him a skinny old man wearing a red jacket and a red and gold fez. The newcomer touched his forehead with two fingers, and bowed low. I almost bowed back.

"This," said the runner by way of explanation, "is your servant."

We blinked. This was news to us. However, before we had time to raise any objection, the old man in the fez produced a small red card, not unlike an English driving licence, which contained his photograph, and declared under the seal of the Government of India that he had a good character. As we examined it for want of knowing what to do, the runner explained that he would do our chores for us, buy us cigarettes, bring us our morning and afternoon tea, make our beds, and generally be handy-man about the place. We inquired politely if the hotel charge, which was certainly high enough, did not include a modicum of service. Oh, yes, of course, but the duties he had enumerated lay outside the scope of the ordinary hotel servants, and we would need a personal servant of our own. It seemed that very few duties were left to the hotel staff, and we had an uncomfortable feeling that somehow, in some way, we were being imposed on, but that craven fear of doing the wrong thing at the wrong time in the wrong place finally overcame our scruples, and the aged Muslim became bound to us for twenty-four hours at the rate of one rupee for the day and one rupee extra for his food.

Having engaged him we were at a complete loss. What on earth were we to do with him? There he stood in a corner waiting for us to issue our commands. Helpfully

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Nora suggested that one of his duties appeared to be to provide us with tea, and that we might prevail on him to do that. He pricked up his ears at the suggestion, and sidled out of the room. Ten minutes later he was back again with two trays. In desperation I sent him off for some cigarettes, but he was back again in five minutes, and so Nora sent him for some stamps. When he came back with these we racked our brains for some other errand, but we could think of nothing more that we wanted until Nora came to the rescue once again with the suggestion that he be told to go away. Fearfully I suggested that his presence was more of an embarrassment than a help, but he took the hint quite pleasantly, and left the room. Half an hour later we went out for a walk, and found him curled up outside the door like a faithful watchdog.

Next day we made friends with a kindly clergyman, who overlooked our lack of credentials and letters of introduction—very important documents in the land of the British Raj—and took us under his powerful wing. He found us a comfortable boarding house where the charges were more in harmony with our resources, and initiated us into the mysteries of the Indian servant problem.

Everyone in India must have his servant. To paraphrase the official guidebook, the days have gone when an Indian hotel was a place where you could get a bed and soda water and nothing else, but a personal servant is still one of the essentials of life. He sees to your personal comfort, which is apt to be neglected by the hotel servants, and, in general, behaves rather like an army batman. You pay him an agreed wage together with an agreed food

allowance, in return for which he becomes your shadow, and, except in the dead of night, is always within earshot. If you travel he travels with you. Only when you quit the shores of India will you lose sight of him, and if you let him know by what boat you will return he will be there waiting on the dock to meet you, even though it means his travelling half-way across the continent.

We did not stick to our old man in the fez, though he stuck hard to us, and followed us about for days. Instead we became the employers of a youngster called Mahmoud who was attached to our new quarters. He proved a real friend, and when both Nora and I were on our backs with fever he kept a ceaseless watch for days and nights on end in the next room. We would have liked to have taken him with us on our travels, but he did not know the ins and outs of journeying in India, and we had regretfully to find ourselves yet another servant before leaving Calcutta. Mahmoud was his name. He was a tall and fierce Pathan with bristling moustaches and a royal dignity of carriage that marked him out as a member of one of the proudest races in India. His one weakness was fine feathers, and I verily believe that he starved himself and his family in order to provide himself with the magnificent garments with which he was constantly dazzling us. You will hear a lot more of him in the coming chapters.

The monsoon was still in full force when we arrived, and most of our month in Calcutta was passed in changing from one set of soaking clothes to another. Only a day or so after our arrival we decided to go for a walk. It was only about half a mile to the Victoria Memorial Building, and it seemed that to stroll across to it would be a good

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method of passing the morning After two hundred yards, however, we began to feel trickles of perspiration running down our bodies Our pace slowed from a stroll to a drag By the time we had reached Chow-ringhee, which was only just over a quarter of a mile away, we were panting breathlessly, and had only just enough energy left to call for a taxi to take us back home Back in our own quarters we stripped, and literally wrung our clothes out into the bath

After a time we began to get acclimatized, but we were never comfortable during the whole of our stay The air was thick with a warm dampness which killed any attempt at energy, and although the sun was, more often than not, hidden by clouds the heat fell like a sodden blanket over the whole town We could not even work up any enthusiasm for the Swimming Club, but merely went there because plunging into the water created an occasional diversion

I suppose it was really being too optimistic to think that fever would not trouble us, but actually the thought of it never entered our heads until one morning I found myself sweating like a pig and groaning with the pain of a headache that seemed to be splitting my head in two A doctor was summoned, who took one look at me, and then ordered an ice pack immediately Half an hour later Nora was in bed as well, and for more than twelve hours we both lay tossing and moaning and perspiring till the very mattresses we lay on were sopping wet

It was not malaria, but dengue, which is better in the long run, for it does not recur, but much worse at the time Colloquially it is known as "break bone" fever, because its aftermath makes you feel as though every bone



in your body has been subjected to individual treatment by an abnormally heavy steam-roller. For a couple of days after the fever left us we lay on our backs cursing the day we had been born. Eventually we began to recover, and a day or two later were able to crawl about for a few hours, but I doubt if we ever got over it completely. Certainly it was a long time before our clothes fitted us again. For reducing purposes dengue fever is better than any artificial device invented by the beauty experts.

## CHAPTER X

*We pay tribute to the Queen Empress, and learn a great deal about the Indians both from those who like them and those who do not*

SITTING down to write about Calcutta makes me feel like a small boy surrounded by his Christmas presents. I don't know where to begin. There is the town itself, its crowded streets and bazaars, the broad spaces of the Maidan, the life and colour of Chowringhee, the stench and bustle round the Kalighat, the buildings of Dalhousie Square, the crowds streaming across the Howrah bridge. Then there are the people, the beggars in the streets, the naked holy men, the coolies in the market, the fat babus on bare feet carrying umbrellas over their arms, the Muslim women shrouded in hoods, the scarlet-coated messengers, the beturbaned *chaprassies*, the Sikh taxi drivers. And there are the scenes that meet the eye each day, religious processions down to the waterfront, holy bulls and cows wandering unconcernedly through the traffic, the never-ending life of the river, the pageant of the passing crowds. It is a city as full of novelties as a carnival, especially when one comes to it with a fresh mind that has known nothing of India before.

Chowringhee is Calcutta's Fifth Avenue or Park Lane. On one side stand the largest European shops, hotels,

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restaurants and apartment houses. On the other the Maidan opens out into a vast expanse of greenery through which one can see the masts and funnels of the ships that ride upon the Hooghli. It is the centre of European life, but it is not a European street. Things happen there that one could scarcely imagine in London or Paris. When we came out of our hotel on our first day there we found a large contented cow sitting squalidly in front of the entrance. No one even thought of attempting to move her. She just sat there, and everyone, ourselves included, moved circumspectly round her.

The Hindu gift of divinity to these animals creates a situation which is, I am sure, unparalleled in any other country in the world. It gives the city the appearance of a rather inefficient cattle-market. Nowhere is free from the animals. They squat before the law-courts, munch contentedly in front of the churches, gaze contemplatively up at business offices, and pay no more attention to the traffic signals than they do to the Prestige of the Englishman. Owner-drivers have to be especially careful. If a sacred cow were run into (they are far too big to be run *over*) there would be a first-class riot raging in a few minutes.

Though they would be more at home in the Indian quarters, the green grass of the Maidan lures them into the select district of Chowringhee. However, the price is not too large, for without that great open expanse Calcutta would be unbearable for the European. No other city in the world can be so much in need of space, and so little endowed with it. Even the moderately wide streets behind Chowringhee have a stuffy, overcrowded atmosphere that makes you feel that the world is too much with

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you The Maidan is the one escape, unless you have time to drive through miles of stenching streets out into the open country. It is rich in grass and trees, and in its centre you can almost imagine yourself blessedly far away from the second city of the Empire.

Apart from the Fort, which houses the city's garrison, there is only one building within the Maidan's boundaries, and it serves more to enhance its charm than to take away from it. Optimists, who like to think that nothing is ever so well done as it is by the British, call it the 'Twentieth Century Taj', thereby throwing the lustre of reflected glory on the Taj Mahal, but it really bears up fairly well to the comparison, though in rather an anæmic way. It is the Victoria Memorial Building, consecrated to the greater glory of the first, and so far only, Queen Empress to hold sway over the brightest jewel in the Imperial Crown.

When we were in Washington in the United States we were struck by the great American capacity for hero-worship. Their method of commemorating their famous dead is as wholesale as their method of popularizing and selling Coca-cola—and nothing could be more wholesale than that. But the Victoria Memorial Building makes the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial seem like rather dingy little experiments.

It is not just the building itself that is in memory of Queen Victoria. All its contents combine into a magnificent pageant of her reign. Innumerable pictures of State Occasions from the first Durbar down to the national mourning for her death line the walls, while hundreds of show-cases provide a resting place for a collection of Victoriana that must be unique in the world.

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All the Viceroys of her time are there as well, to say nothing of continual reappearances of King Edward VII, or, as he was then, the Prince of Wales.

Many of the rooms are filled with old prints of various views of Indian cities, or aspects of Indian life. Print-making seems to have been one of the favourite hobbies of life in India during that period, judging from their immense number and variety. One can just imagine the immense export trade there must have been for them when every Victorian front parlour was screaming for a coloured view of the waterfront at Bombay, or a picture of a real Raja bristling with golden-handled sabres and waxed moustachios. They still have their interest, however, for they show how the Indian cities grew from small compounds into vast networks of streets, and give some idea of the immensity of the changes which time and British Imperialism have wrought.

The Victoria Memorial Building is practically all that Calcutta can boast of in the architectural field. Otherwise the buildings are a sorry lot, excepting only St. Andrew's Church, which is so solidly Presbyterian in appearance and in atmosphere that it seems a veritable island of sanity in a sea of brick and stone nightmares. Calcutta's architects were nourished in the Victorian tradition, but they must have felt that they owed something to the land of their adoption, for they appear to have conceived it to be their bounden duty to adorn their creations with oriental flourishes, placing cupolas in the most inappropriate positions, and intermixing their abundantly mock Gothic with a salting of Moorish arches and inconsequent minarets. The Law Courts are supposed to be a replica of the Cloth Hall at Ypres, but I doubt if the resemblance

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goes very far. If it does, then one can only say that the German artillery was fully justified.

Quite apart from our discovery of Calcutta was our discovery of the European element there. We soon made friends, for in spite of all that is said about the exclusiveness of the Sahib he is quite ready to take you on his level if only you can provide yourself with the very necessary introduction. We had come without these introductions, but the kindly offices of the same clergyman who found us a boarding house soon remedied the defect.

In Malaya the Europeans are at peace with the natives. In India we found that this was anything but the case. The reason is easy to find. The Malays are not, as yet, competing for power, the Indians are. Malayan civilization is at a low ebb, Indian civilization has dug itself well into the soil, and is not inclined to yield itself to the new comer. There is hostility in Calcutta, in Singapore, Penang, Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh there is an easy tolerance.

To walk through Calcutta's bazaars makes you feel as though you are strolling down the main street of a Cathedral City after having run off with a Canon's wife. You are cut on every side. Scowls are your only greeting. Only the beggars fail to shun you, and even in their approaches you can sense an element of contempt, as though they say to themselves 'Here is a European. He is a fool with his money.'

It is not surprising that Englishwomen go in perpetual fear of rape, even though it is a thing that is scarcely ever known to happen. The lowering, unfriendly stares which fall to the lot of every European who strays out

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of his proper habitat are enough to send cold shivers down anybody's spine.

And yet, there are plenty of Indians who are merely apathetic, if not actually friendly. They just take no notice of Europeans, who are becoming quite common phenomena, and this probably accounts for the feeling of receiving a direct cut. There was a time when Indians would salaam to every passing white man. These days have passed. A month or two later we met an old fellow who had come out as a soldier when the Queen-Empress was still on the throne, and had stayed on in business instead of returning home at the end of his term of service. I asked him if he had seen many changes.

"Changes!" he snorted. "Why, when I first came out 'ere a native would salaam to you. Now you might be anyone."

It is this feeling of being "anyone" that gripes the ordinary European. He feels, not altogether without justification, that he is "someone", and wants to be treated as such. The absence of any response gets under his skin, and makes him abuse the people he rules. Here are some of the chance remarks we heard in ordinary conversation. They demonstrate why the Indian and the European do not always run very well in double harness.

"Oh, the post's always late here. Delivery always depends on how long it takes the Post Office babus to extract all the cheques and postal orders."

"Indian shopkeepers are awful scoundrels. You've got to watch them, for they'll cheat you if they possibly can." But, later, speaking of a European shop—"Oh, no. Don't go there. They'll soak you good and plenty." The

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Indian, you see, is a cheat, while the European merely overcharges

"You know how, when you are driving your car out of a gateway, any English labourer will wave you on if there is nothing coming? Well, the Indian won't do that. Oh, dear me, no. He might wave you on if there *was* something coming—just for the fun of seeing the crash—but that's all he would do."

"Good heavens, no! I wouldn't travel in a tram along with one of these filthy babus."

"You know the Bengali. He's wonderful at beating up old men, but when it comes to the police and getting hurt himself, he makes a run for it."

"My opinion is that the Indians as a whole were far better off in the old days of autocratic government, when they grovelled in the dirt, and rubbed their noses in it in the presence of white men."

Not very hopeful for the future? We must remember, however, that not every Englishman talks like that. There are some, a minority it is true, who really do know the country they live in, and realize the folly of their own countrymen. And, happily, they are the people who really count in the administration. They know the people they rule, for their work carries them amongst them, and teaches them that the Indian is very much like the European.

I once spoke to an Indian official about a famous Hindu agitator in Calcutta, the editor of a newspaper which spent its time in calling down fire and brimstone on the heads of the British. I was scarcely prepared for the reply I received.

"——? He's a very interesting man. As a matter of



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time before they can do that. They are not so efficient as we are. But I can see their point of view."

Which only shows that whatever you hear about India, there is sure to be someone who will say the opposite. There are as many different opinions on the Indian problem as there are about the length of the Forth Bridge, and somewhere in the midst of them the truth must lie, probably not expressed by any one person, but waiting with all manner of patience for some future historian to dig it out, and explain to the world exactly why it was that the great British Empire in India collapsed into that same chaos from which it arose.

Henceforth I shall leave politics alone. They do not belong to a travel book. If I seem to show any predilection towards any one point of view, then blame India and not me, for politics are the King Charles's Head of any book on India, and anyone writing about the country must have the fullest sympathy with the unfortunate Mr. Dick.

Another Englishman said to me of Katherine Mayo's book, *Mother India*, "Have you read the drain inspector's report? It's high time that someone wrote about the beautiful things in India."

That is what I want to do.

## CHAPTER XI

*We drive out of Calcutta, and discover India. Back in Calcutta once again we study the newspapers, and pay a visit to the Thieves' Bazaar*

ONE of the misfortunes of travelling is that you are led, almost by instinct, to regard the countries you are visiting as savage lands. Even in Europe it is difficult to avoid a feeling of superiority. In America you are patronizing before you arrive. In the East you are fully convinced that you are surrounded by a mass of heathens, who are restrained from cannibalism by your own good example.

British insularity is to blame. We can never convince ourselves that there may be other ways of living than our own. Nevertheless, so far as the East is concerned, at any rate, there is something rather natural in the feeling. We all know that savages have dark skins, and it is an easy logical mistake to presume that all people with dark skins are savages. If only they would wear trousers and drink whisky we might be more inclined to claim kinship with them, but so long as they insist on loin-cloths and *dhobis*, on vegetarianism and teetotalism, what on earth are we to think?

But it is an impression that cannot last. In Malaya one feels that the natives have never reached a high standard of civilization, but in India even the blind must see sooner

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or later that here is a culture, a civilization, that has its roots deep buried in the past

Though well versed in Indian history we only reached this conclusion by degrees. The first impact with India was too abrupt, too sudden, to allow us to orientate ourselves immediately. All our senses revolted against the acceptance of these strange people as the inheritors of all the glories of Asoka and Timurlane, of Akbar and Shah Jahan. It all seemed an impossible muddle of sweating coolies, obscene beggars, oily babus and semi Europeanized politicians. It had no cohesion, no unity of purpose or aim such as the very word, civilization, implies.

We soon got to know better. Even in Calcutta, where there is less of the old India left than in any other city, we began to trace a pattern in that vivid, swarming life. The crowds that thronged the streets were very like the crowds of London, though in a different guise. They were all there—the rich, the poor, the middle classes, the labourers, the tradesmen, the merchants, the craftsmen, the successes, the failures, the clerics, the intriguers, the crafty, the simple, the pompous, the cringing, the self-assured. What did it matter if they wore funny clothes, and didn't mind the close proximity of dirt? The point was that they were all members of a vast social system in which every one of them had his place. Such social systems do not suddenly spring from nowhere, they grow gradually, so gradually that each generation scarcely sees a change, they steadily create an inter-dependence amongst all their members, whereby each man and woman becomes one with all the rest. That is civilization. That is India.

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The British have merely imposed themselves in a layer above the rest. They have not searched the lower depths. They have scarcely affected them. In the towns you see their influence at its peak; in the country you see how it has scarcely made an appearance.

One Sunday we drove to Chandernagore, some thirty miles up the Hooghli. We were soon clear of the town, and driving along the Grand Trunk Road, which belied its name by being very bumpy, very narrow, very twisted and very crowded. Time and again we had to crawl behind lumbering bullock-carts, and even at the best of times it was difficult to reach a speed of more than twenty miles an hour, for the road was thick with people going to and coming from the markets. Everyone was in native dress; not a pair of trousers was to be seen. On the other hand, there was very little of the bright gaiety of Malaya. A few of the women wore coloured saris, but the majority wore only dirty white cotton.

We passed a number of holy men, clad only in a scanty loin-cloth, their long hair hanging lankly to their waist, and here and there we would see a man squatting motionless by the roadside, rapt in meditation—or, as some Englishmen would say, “thinking of damn-all”. They never moved a muscle, and were absolutely oblivious to all that was going on around them. If they had been thinking of nothing at all, and merely resting idly by the roadside, they would have followed the passers-by with their eyes. But they never even seemed to see them. Meditation seems to be accepted in India as a very natural occupation.

Though we had seen comparatively few women in Calcutta, here we saw them in great numbers, usually

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walking together in bunches of six or ten, gossiping together loudly and enthusiastically. They seemed happy here, not oppressed by poverty as they were in the town. Perhaps the most interesting thing about them were the small brass bowls in which they were carrying their purchases. Nothing so vulgar as a basket or a string bag! Indeed, no! Each carried a glistening brass bowl or pot, beautifully fashioned, and crammed full of fruit or vegetables. Some of these bowls were large, others small, some carried in the hands, others held by strings.

At every village through which we passed we saw men and women washing themselves at the pumps. Even here there were brass utensils in use, for the method of washing was to fill a brass bowl with water and then pour it over oneself. They kept all their clothes on, that being the respectable thing to do, and then just let them get wet along with themselves.

Law and order are, on the whole, well maintained in India, but the imported British police force should not get all the credit. We have done away with the thuggee and dacoity which were rampant when we came, but the men who indulged in these pursuits lived outside the pale of the society on which they preyed. Within itself that society was strong and law abiding. It could not deal with its outlaws for the same reason that we could not deal with ours until we had invented our modern police system.

This society of which we were catching a glimpse was neither primitive nor unstable. It was merely different. All these people drifting along the road, at the roadside, standing in the villages, place. We kicked ourselves for

otherwise, and there was awakened in us a new interest in this strangely colourful and varied land.

In Chandernagore we were once more outside the confines of the British Empire, for this quaint little town still belongs to France. It is nominally garrisoned by a few French troops, and is ruled by a French Governor. The French, so it is said, do not consider their possession of much worth, and would very much like to exchange it for something better. Unfortunately we do not feel inclined to swap, and so they are still there. They make the best of it, but it is a place with no future so long as it maintains its present isolation. It serves simply as a local Paris for Calcutta. It boasts a number of low dives and agreeable ladies, and several hotels for week-end couples. You can buy tolerable *vin-du-pays*, and there is also a modest quantity of immodest literature for sale.

Its chief business is smuggling. Goods consigned to Chandernagore cannot be touched by the Indian Customs Officers, and it is rather difficult to prevent such goods from finding their way back into British India. Only a few weeks earlier a funeral making its way to some burning ghats across the border was stopped by Customs Officers, and it was discovered that the "corpse" had been carefully constructed of bales of foreign silk. It is also a useful shopping base for the Mem Sahibs of Calcutta, who find that they can purchase materials quite cheaply there, and merely give the Indian Customs Officers a haughty stare on their return.

Not far off in a small village called Bandel there is a relic of much earlier days. It is an old Catholic Church, founded by the Portuguese as long ago as 1599. It is

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well preserved, and pleasantly cool inside, and in the cloisters there is a small shrine or grotto dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. In the courtyard outside many of the tombstones date back for centuries, but the most interesting memorial of all is an ancient ship's mast standing square in the middle of the garden in the front. The story goes that a sea-captain caught in a typhoon vowed that if the good Lord would ever allow him to sight the spire of Bandel Church from the waters of the Hooghly, he would present it with the mainmast of his ship in gratitude. The good Lord stayed the hand of the typhoon, and the sea-captain kept his side of the bargain. The story does not go on to relate how he sailed away without his mast.

Back in Calcutta we passed our days lazily enough, yet always discovering something new, a fresh "angle" on Indian society, fresh attitudes of mind displayed by the Indians to whom we talked, new corners of the city to be explored, new social customs of the British to be marvelled at.

We took to reading Indian-owned newspapers, and were amazed both at the excellent manner in which they were produced, and at the extraordinary language in which many of the articles and letters were written. Both a Muslim and a Hindu paper are published in English in Calcutta, and they carry on a duel worthy of Messrs Pott and Slurk. Here, for example, is an extract from a leader in the Muslim paper, *Star of India*

"The result is the strange spectacle of our Hindu Brethren smiling and weeping at the same time! If any of our readers

Unity in Bengal'. 'For a curious complex of annoyance at thwarted intrigue, feigned satisfaction at Muslim unity forced by a consciousness that the world is looking on, and innuendoes and suggestions that may even now make the cup of unity slip from the Muslim lip—our Baghbazar contemporary's performance deserves to be preserved in some special museum of psychological curiosities, and, shall we say, monstrosities.'

Then there are the advertisements, which read strangely to our alien eye. Marriage is important in India, where less attention is paid to personal tastes than in the romantic West, and leads to announcements in the classified ads section such as this one, culled from the aforementioned *Amrita Bazar Patrika*:

"A YOUNG GRADUATE of Bharadwaj Goitra Vaidya Group, established in life, fair and healthy, is ready to marry a cross-eyed, one-eyed or dumb, but fair and healthy girl. No tight caste preferences. Dowry expected: Rs. 10,000/-."

This, too, seems worthy of note in a land where politics are the breath of life, but propaganda only just coming into its own:

"WANTED—A BENGALI gentleman, with poetic gift, to compose propaganda songs, after the lines suggested to him. One with sympathetic attitude towards Arya Samaj will be preferred. Reasonable remuneration."



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But perhaps the medical advertisements are the best of the lot. This one is typical

"DON'T YOU WORRY Your Cancer, Carbuncle, Gangrene, Piles, Fistula or any other kinds of sores or skin diseases will be radically cured without operation by ——"

That one comes from an Indian paper. Here is another, more poetic in structure and appearance, which we read in respectable, British-owned *Statesman*

"LIKE TENNYSON'S BROOK      neglected piles go on for ever. Hemoids stops them, cures them and eradicates them Rs 1/8 from ——"

Not all advertisements come from Indians, however. Here is one which, on the face of it, seems scarcely noteworthy, but which illustrates a very potent factor in European life

'YOUNG LADY (CHELTENHAM COLLEGE) visiting Calcutta and Delhi for the winter, wishes to be received as paying guest for £20 a month in the best social circles. Apply by Air Mail to Lady ——'

The Indian Marriage Mart is functioning as vigorously as in Kipling's day

One evening a friend took us to see Calcutta's Caledonian Market. It is a vast, rambling maze of narrow lanes, lined on either side with small shops and stalls. It goes by the name of Chuabazar, and is colloquially known as the 'Thieves' Market, because it harbours more receivers of stolen goods than any other quarter of the

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town. Like London's Caledonian Market, however, it seems to consist mostly of junk—and western junk at that. There are hot-water bottles, snuff boxes, mechanical toys, water filters, chipped china, footballs, prints of *The Boyhood of Raleigh* and *The Thorn-Crowned Christ*, hideous highly-coloured oleographs of *The Bride and True Love*, gaudy chandeliers, chambers, bed-pans, and bits and pieces of everything that goes to make up our complicated twentieth-century civilization.

Here and there amongst the wreckage we came upon a few odd pieces which we would not have minded owning ourselves. There was a beautiful porcelain Buddha from Japan for which the dealer was asking two hundred rupees—though I am sure he would gladly have taken fifty—some lovely glass decanters, and a set of excellent Wedgwood china. Curiously, however, there was very little Indian work for sale. Nearly all of it came from European or Anglo-Indian households, and was probably destined to adorn the homes of those half-Europeanized Indians who are drifting back into the country in thousands every year. The chandeliers, our friend told us, probably came from Rajas' palaces, old, discarded finery which had been sold off.

Sometimes one does make a real find. Our friend, who knew the place inside out, and was continually routing round amongst its alleyways, had at various times provided himself with some exquisite silverware, a set of rather lovely dining-room chairs, and a signed photograph of Lady Minto, the wife of the Viceroy—this last cost him the appalling sum of three shillings.

It requires perseverance to make such discoveries, however. The Indian traders scarcely seem to appreciate

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that their wares do not all appeal to Europeans. In one shop a very ancient Muslim gentleman detained us for about half an hour trying to sell us a weird assortment of goods. He began with a snuff box, and followed it up with a couple of cheap Chinese scent bottles, after that he produced a cruet stand, probably made in Birmingham in the '80's, and when he could not tempt us with that, he produced a mustard pot on the assumption that we shared with him a profound contempt for the Hindu attitude towards beef. Finally he produced his chief *objet d'art*—a mechanical boat. He took the greatest delight in explaining to us in broken English how it worked, showing us how the propeller turned, and how the rudder could be made to move. It came from Japan, and would be sold for not more than threepence in Woolworths. None the less he looked on it as the greatest treasure in his store.

Yes, Calcutta fails to show India at its best. To it belong the worst vices of both civilizations, and very few of the virtues. Stick to Chowringhee, the restaurants, the night clubs and the cinemas, and you will have a moderately good time, but if you want to see India, the India that has endured for many thousands of years and never has yielded and never will yield up its soul to the alien invader, then you must avoid it like the plague, and search elsewhere. It is like other towns all over the world, the seat of commerce and industry where man has ceased to acknowledge his own birthright, and has become a fragment of that vast tangle of interlocking motives to which we have given the name of civilization.

## CHAPTER XII

*We climb up into the shadow of the Himalayas, where we  
are serenaded by a Tibetan minstrel, and see a fairy palace  
of ice high above us in the sky*

OVER and over again we had discussed the possibility of driving through India by car. The good roads of Malaya had made us bold, and we looked forward confidently both to cutting down our travelling expenses, and to getting well away from the railway tracks. We had not been long in Calcutta, however, before we discovered that this was not going to be as easy as we had imagined. Oh, yes! We could drive all the way to Peshawar if we wanted to, and from Peshawar to Bombay, and from Bombay to Madras. Of course, the roads were not all that they should be, and for some time to come there would be a considerable danger of flooding. Also there were several rivers over which it would be necessary to have the car shipped by train, and there were a large number of places entirely unserved by roads. Petrol was dear, and supplies of it were rather few and far between. Spare parts too were obtainable in most of the larger towns, though these were a trifle far apart, and one might easily get caught between them.

We are as adventurous as most people, I trust, but we were anxious to see India rather than to have an exciting time, and the prospect of floods and breakdowns and bad

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roads was not very enthralling. Reluctantly we decided that the humdrum railway would suit our purpose better.

Train travel in India is something of a problem for the newcomer. Deeply impressed by the all important part played by Prestige, and having, no doubt, read Aldous Huxley's account of a most disquieting experience in a second-class compartment, he is inclined to favour the exclusiveness resulting from the payment of a first-class fare. But first-class rates are by no means light. They are almost double second-class, and on many of the railways the only difference lies in the bunks being slightly broader and slightly softer. The real point is that very few Indians can afford to pay first-class rates, and, even if they can, they consider it a very foolish and extravagant thing to do. Consequently the European whose finances will stand the strain can be fairly sure that he will be allowed to enjoy his compartment in peace. Other reasons have been given me—in particular the theory that British soldiers, who cannot travel with their officers must be provided with accommodation other than the cattle trucks used by the Indian rank and file—but they were advanced rather diffidently, and I feel sure that the racial issue is the predominating factor.

In the end we decided to travel second-class, and never once did we have occasion to regret it. Nearly always we enjoyed a compartment to ourselves, and when we did have companions we always got on very well together, and suffered none of the humiliations nor unpleasantnesses that we were told would inevitably fall to our lot.

Before leaving Calcutta we placed ourselves in the hands of our new travelling servant, Mahmoud. He showed his taste for fine clothes almost immediately by

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trying to make it a term of his contract that we should provide him with a new outfit. For a few moments it seemed as though nothing would induce him to serve us in his old clothes, but we held out, and discovered to our delight that his claim was a pure formality, in spite of all his stubbornness, and that our failure to provide a wardrobe did not detract in the least from his usefulness.

How much he made out of us in the shape of excess charges I do not know, but he certainly seemed to be worth his weight in gold. He would never let us pay more than what he thought to be a fair price, and his cunning in the art of bargaining was equalled only by the fury he let loose on those who tried to cheat us. He behaved towards us in a politely condescending manner, which thoroughly unnerved us both for the first few days, but, as we became more accustomed to his mannerisms and thoroughly ferocious appearance, we slowly slipped into a relationship which was both friendly and mutually valuable.

I can well imagine that some of the friends we made in India will stand aghast at this last paragraph. We were told frequently that all Indian servants were villains of the first degree, waiting only for an opportunity to rob their employers, and anxious to do as little as possible in return for their wages. It may be that Mahmoud deceived us disgustingly, and that the only reason for his apparent honesty was that a favourable opportunity for robbing us never presented itself, but I do not think so. Looking back on our Indian tour, his cheery face is one of my most pleasant memories, and I know that we would both trust ourselves anywhere in his charge.

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The Darjeeling Mail leaves Calcutta in the evening. When we arrived at the station Mahmoud, who had gone ahead with the luggage, met us, and conducted us to our compartment. At first sight it seemed to be unbearably dirty, but actually it was as clean as one could expect. It was only bare and cheerless. A prison cell, however spotless it may be, never looks really clean, and the same may be said of an Indian railway compartment. A seat, upholstered in worn black leather, ran the whole width of the carriage, and above it the upper berth was drawn up against the wall. Opposite there was a blank wooden wall, unrelieved by even the slightest trace of decoration. A door in this wall led into an equally bare toilet. It was depressing to say the least of it, but Mahmoud quickly *made up our beds, and, without waiting for the train to start, we undressed, and turned out the lights*.

We were awake early the next morning, and looked out over an infinity of open plains. Rice fields lay all round us, and here and there amongst them were tiny Indian villages. Unlike the villages in Malaya and Siam they were closely huddled into little knots, and surrounded by what seemed to be palisades. There were no isolated houses or huts, nothing whatever corresponding to our English farm houses. The Indian peasant is communal by nature. He will never live on his land, but will herd together with the others in the village, even though it means a walk of several miles to his work each morning. Now and again we would see a peasant clad *only in a rough loin-cloth* making his way to his fields, but it was still too early for the majority to be out, and the plains wore a deserted, lifeless air.

The sky was heavily overcast, and we looked in vain

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for the foothills of the Himalayas ahead of us. It was not till we were nearing Siliguri that we first caught sight of them, a dark line running the whole length of the northern horizon, rising like a wall from the flat plains. There seemed to be no intermediate stage. The plains simply came to an end, the foothills of the mighty mountains rearing up from them like the skyscrapers to the south of Central Park.

We breakfasted at Siliguri, and then transferred to a car which was to take us the remainder of our journey. A railway of sorts does run up to Darjeeling, but it is a miniature affair, a matter of a two-foot gauge and an asthmatic mountain engine which crawls slowly up the steep grades, and succeeds in completing the journey in six hours as compared with the motor-car's three. Moreover, unless one travels third-class, which even the most democratic European would scarcely do, the cost of the car is actually less, provided that there is more than one passenger.

For the first few miles we continued to run over flat country between rows of tea-gardens (why "tea-gardens", I never discovered; one never speaks of "tea-gardeners") in which the workers were already busy; but after less than five miles we came to the limits of the plains, and from that time we never stopped climbing until we were within sight of Darjeeling. It was not long until we were well above the plains, and now and then when the road emerged from the thick forests we were able to look back over them, and see them spread out far away into the hazy distance. A broad river, cut into half a dozen channels which flowed in and out of one another in a haphazard fashion, reflected the grey of the clouds above it



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as though it had been cut from silver paper, and the villages seemed but dark patches set in the brighter green of the growing rice. The road wound its way up the hillside in a series of astonishing bends, and at times we were able to look down and see it hundreds of feet directly beneath us.

The lower reaches of the hills were planted with tea bushes, which were set in long parallel lines following the contours of the slopes. Looking at them from the distance it seemed as though they were the wax impressions of a giant's finger prints.

These fine views were not to last for ever, unfortunately, for after we had been climbing for about an hour we reached the clouds, and were draped in a damp, cold mist which continued to shroud us nearly all the way to Darjeeling. Our last view of the plains was magnificent, for the clouds lay low over them, and we could see what seemed to be large balls of fluff lying casually on the flat earth.

Yet even the mist had its charm. We would seem to be driving along the rim of an immense bowl of nothingness, for on our open side there was literally nothing to be seen except possibly the dim shadow of a nearby tree. We had passed out of the timber belt, and trees appeared only rarely. The solid tangible world simply came to an end. We had come to the very edge of beyond. Sometimes the clouds would be swept away for a fleeting moment, and we would catch a glimpse of the opposite side of the valley, with its greenness slashed by the crooked white lines of the waterfalls. As quickly as it had come it would disappear again, and we would be on the edge of the world once more. Once, just when we

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were coming up to the clouds, we looked ahead up a valley we were entering. It was like a seething cauldron. Great billows of mist, caught in a powerful updraught, seemed to be pouring out of it like steam, and in the places where this mist was thin the hillside beyond showed through a slightly darker shade, giving us the impression that a most terrible thunderstorm was brewing.

Then again, through the mist we would catch sight of waterfalls, all glistening white, or of great boulders poised miraculously above our heads as though ready to dash us to death at any moment; and at the sharp corners where our driver had to travel slowly we would see the wet rocks literally dripping with moss and gay wild flowers.

Darjeeling straddles a long ridge which falls away sharply on either side into deep, gaping valleys. It stands almost on the confines of British India with only the small Native State of Sikkim separating it from the highlands of Tibet. Standing on one of the look-out points one can see clearly into the forbidden country, one of the few places in the world which still remain a mystery to Europe. Its great mountains rise up like a perpetual challenge to the adventurous. Often we would sit staring at them in the cool evening air, wondering what lay beyond, and whether we would ever pass over them to see for ourselves. It is a place for day-dreams. The surrounding scenery is conceived on so colossal a scale that it raises the mind far above its daily ruts, and sets it adventuring high and low in the realms of the strange and the fantastical.

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Seven thousand feet had raised us into a world entirely different from the relaxing, humid plains. The air was crisp and keen, and we needed warm blankets to counteract the chilliness of the nights. In the daytime we could walk briskly along the ridge without being drenched in sweat, and after dinner we could warm ourselves at a brightly burning fire.

Amongst the natives the change was even more remarkable. The people of the hills belong to a race entirely different from the people of the plains. They are Mongols rather than Indians, as their flat features and *almond shaped eyes make abundantly plain*. They are sturdier too, squat and muscular and powerfully strong. It would be strange if they were not, for they labour under none of the climatic disadvantages that sap the strength and manhood of the Bengali, and the strenuous life which is demanded of everyone living in mountainous country builds up a reserve of power which is hard to come by on the flat, malaria ridden plains.

The women in particular are astonishingly powerful, and drag about loads we would think it cruel to saddle on a mule. Often we would see them trudging up the steep hill passes, bent almost double under an immense bundle, and yet plodding forward with the steady doggedness of a machine. The men rarely took such tasks upon themselves, and seemed to look on it as a matter of course that their womenfolk should do the heavy work, a strange attitude to which we could never reconcile ourselves.

I well remember coming on an unusual example of this when we were out walking one afternoon. We were on the road which runs right round the point of the ridge, a

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footpath really, only a few yards broad. There had been heavy rains a short time before, so heavy that parts of the path had been completely washed away, and repair works were in progress at several points. As we were walking along this road at a place where the gradient was fairly steep we suddenly rounded a corner, and came upon a gang of workers engaged in pulling a heavy roller uphill over the new-laid gravel. It was a large roller, a good five feet in diameter, and though there were twenty workers harnessed to it they had to strain every muscle to get it to move at all. And each one of these workers was a woman! The only man was the foreman, or overseer, and the only assistance he condescended to give was to run up and down the line of sweating women, yelling loudly in their ears.

We passed on feeling rebelliously angry, no more at the man himself than at the Government which permitted such things to happen. But in that we ran up against the greatest difficulty one can meet in any attempt to consider eastern problems—the difficulty of trying to see the East through western eyes. In the hill country it has been the custom for women to do such work for longer than the whole period of our civilization. To impose our standards on them is like trying to read Hindi with the help only of an English-German dictionary. The real point at issue was whether it would have been any better if the workers had been men, and the foreman a woman. I do not think that it would. To see human beings, whatever their sex, labouring like beasts of burden is both horrible and degrading. Our anger was stimulated because the sight was aggravated by standards which were ours alone, but fundamentally it rested on the facts that

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here, in a world of plenty, human beings had to slave like beasts to earn the pittance that would separate them from starvation. Not even the vilest poverty we had witnessed in Calcutta had moved us as this sight of almost sub-human degradation.

Later, when we mentioned what we had seen to an Englishman well acquainted with the country, we were fobbed off with the traditional answer, "Oh, they don't mind. They're used to it." We could scarcely help wondering what had happened to the great "civilizing mission" of the white man when such deplorable conditions met with so complacent a response.

To return to the hill people, however, they are a wonderfully picturesque race. On the Saturday and Sunday of every week a market is held in Darjeeling to which come all the peasants of the surrounding district, and one has only to go down to the market place on one of these two days to see a magnificent kaleidoscope of colour which has no equal in the world.

The market place occupies about two acres, and, during the week, is merely a vast expanse of concrete, innocent of anything but a few stray dogs and a hillman or two sleeping in the sun. But on Friday night it gradually begins to fill as merchants from the outlying villages come in with their stores of goods for sale. Early on Saturday morning it has been filled with temporary stalls, and throughout that day and the next it is crowded with villagers who had trudged many a weary mile to lay in a stock of provisions and little luxuries. They are dressed in their best clothes, for it is an occasion of importance, and when the market is over there is plenty of time for gossip, or for a visit to one of the troupes of strolling

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players who have come to scrape the froth from the glass of commerce.

The women, strong and sturdy as young ponies, look very resplendent in their jewellery. From their ears hang large discs of gold beaten into complicated designs and set with precious stones; stuck into the left side of their noses are golden studs, an inch or more in diameter; round their necks hang necklaces of gold beads; and on their wrists and ankles they wear large silver rings which clank tunefully as they walk. So much decoration sounds very expensive, and if it cost as much as its magnificent appearance would seem to warrant one would think the entire population of the hills to be far wealthier than the inhabitants of Park Lane. Actually, when handled, this jewellery turns out to be tawdry stuff. We visited one of the jewellers' stalls, and inspected it at close quarters. The gold was of a very inferior quality, and beaten out to such wafer-like dimensions as to appear to have no weight at all. The ear-rings consisted of large discs three or four inches in diameter, and looked as though they would almost pull the lobe away from the rest of the ear, but they were so thin that they weighed less than a feather, and so fragile that they could be crumpled up in the hand like a piece of paper. The same is true of the silver anklets and bracelets. To begin with they are not silver at all, but some very cheap metal, and, secondly, they are hollow, and extremely light. Nevertheless, when a hill-woman is decked out in all her glory she is magnificent.

There were many market women in the crowd as well, self-appointed porters who wandered about with baskets on their backs (or, if they could not afford baskets, empty

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kerosene cans), looking for employers who would hire them to carry their purchases. One little girl, no more than twelve or thirteen years old, followed us wherever we went, keeping up an endless refrain of, "Coolie, Sahib Coolie, Memsahib." In the end I got her to stand for her photograph, and rewarded her with what she appeared to think a princely sum—one anna. At any rate she must have thought that we had hired her, for she followed us for the rest of the morning, no longer pressing her services on us, but waiting patiently for us to make the purchases which we had paid her to carry.

The market was divided into sections, fruit here, brass there, jewellery over in the corner, clothing over to the right. The stalls of brassware were the most interesting. Pots, goblets, jugs, bowls, all lay in great piles, glistening brightly under the sun. Some were perfectly plain, though beautifully shaped, while on others designs had been hammered out with a chisel. Each was the product of individual craftsmanship, and not of the mass production factory. We picked up several of them, and were astonished at their weight. The price the dealers were asking was equally astonishing, for they demanded no more than twelve annas each for fine brass goblets, each of which must have weighed a good half pound. As we were Europeans the price quoted us probably allowed for a profit of at least fifty per cent over and above that made out of the ordinary native purchaser. They were sold by weight and not by number to the hill people. Each stallholder was provided with a large pair of scales in which he weighed the total amount of brass he sold to each customer before quoting a price.

Wandering here and there amongst the crowd were a

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number of lamas, or Buddhist priests, from a nearby Lamasery. Dressed in a most incredible assortment of picturesque rags they added a flavour of the unreal to the scene. Some had blankets flung round them, and some tattered cloaks; some wore Robin Hood hats, with a feather stuck in at a rakish angle, and some a head-gear reminiscent of a Bishop's mitre. Each carried various sacred symbols, of which the most popular seemed to be a trident, and each was equipped with a prayer-wheel and a begging bowl. Their procedure was simple. A lama would come to a stall, and stand before it turning the prayer-wheel, thereby conferring some inestimable blessing on the stallholders. At the same time he would hold out the begging bowl ostentatiously, and the stallholders would throw into it either a small coin or something edible from the stall. This system of payment in kind instead of payment in cash did not always react to the benefit of the lamas. The stallholders nearly always seemed to choose fruit that was on the point of going bad, if it had not done so already, and I saw one poor lama whose bowl was filled exclusively with lemons.

Perhaps the most picturesque figure of all was a wandering minstrel whom we met in one of the narrow backstreets near the market-place. He was indeed a thing of shreds and patches, all in rags and tatters with a battered blue hat on his head, and a rude guitar in his hand. He tried to sell us a curious ring he was wearing on one finger—it was made out of an old Chinese coin—but his exorbitant price made it clear that, even though he had come from the furthest corner of Tibet, he was not unacquainted with the habits and gullibility of the white tourist. We let the "bargain" pass. However, I did want



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a photograph, and so I showed him an anna, and motioned towards the camera. He understood, and, picking up his guitar, began to play a strange and rather pleasant melody. When he received his anna he bowed low with a grace scarcely to be expected from such a tattered figure, and his dull Mongolian features lit up in a rare smile. He continued to serenade us until we were out of earshot.

We never saw him again. He came and disappeared like a breath of wind. But I can still remember him vividly, and also that strange, plaintive melody he conjured up from his primitive instrument. More than any other character we saw he made me long to get behind these mountains into mysterious Tibet.

The monsoon was not completely past, and, during our stay the days were rarely free from clouds. We began to fear that we were not going to catch a glimpse of the famous Kinchinjanga, for, although Mahmoud wakened us at sunrise every morning, it was only to see masses of grey cloud hanging low over the nearest hills.

But one morning our perseverance was rewarded. Mahmoud wakened us as usual, and we struggled out on to the balcony, screwing up our sleep-filled eyes. As on other mornings we were filled with a sense of disappointment—only greyness lay before us, the greyness of dark hills in the early dawn. Then suddenly—"Oh, look!" There, floating easily high above the clouds, pure white peaks shining clear against the pale blue of the morning sky, a fairy palace of ice immeasurably high above us. We had been looking straight ahead, and had only seen the cloud banks collected on the nearer hilltops. Kinchin-

janga stood as high above us as the English midday sun above the horizon on a summer day. There were a dozen peaks at least, each rising above its neighbour, and then Kinchinjanga itself crowning them all, raising itself proudly over 28,000 feet into the sky. No wonder the hill people look on it as a god! It was one of the most unreal, one of the most superhuman sights I have ever seen.

We set up a telescope, and, just as Nora focused it on the topmost peak, the first rays of the sun were reflected back to us. Kinchinjanga blazed with fire, at first only at a single point, as though a massive ruby had been set upon the peak; but as the sun, still hidden from us, raced up towards the horizon the shadows fled down the mountain's flanks, and all its eastern slopes reflected the blood-red coming of the day.

Through the telescope we watched each detail of the change, saw the line of fire rush down and fling the western crevasses into pitch-black shadow, saw the rich fantastic colour spread itself deeper and deeper down towards the ring of cloud on which the whole enchanted mountain floated. Then, as quickly as it had come, the colour began to fade, to be replaced by a blinding white brilliance as the sun rushed up into the clear sky.

Coming from nowhere a wreath of cloud wrapped itself round the peak of Kinchinjanga—just the faintest of wisps, an airy fragment so slight as to have almost no existence. Another followed it, and from the cloud-banks far below soft puffs of cotton-wool began to rise. No cinema craftsman could have conceived a fade-out more sublime. Before our very eyes that fairy mountain dissolved into the nothingness from which it had come. A

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man, bound to a strenuous mode of life which allows little time for cultural refinements, is more body than brains, and therefore finds it easier to be contented.

This, naturally, is not all the truth. It would be a simple world to live in if everything could be disposed of as easily. The hillman, who is a Buddhist, and a primitive Buddhist at that, is free from the cloying tangles of an over-developed Hinduism, such as meets the Indians of the plains at every turn. This alone must account for much. If we were to press the point further we would find yet other reasons, the low state of the hillman's civilization, the differences in his mode of life which cut him off from the rest of India. But the fundamental reason is what I have said; the hillman is not sufficiently ambitious to want to change his status, and that makes him particularly easy to rule. Empire-building would be a simple matter if only all the eastern peoples were like him.

We stayed in Darjeeling for only one week. On the afternoon of the seventh day we climbed into a car once more, and started on our journey down to the plains. It was like the day on which we had arrived. Great billows of mist had steamed up from the valleys, and for the first half of the journey we saw practically nothing beyond sudden snatches of the opposite hills. However, by the time we had reached Kurseong, the half-way house, the clouds lay well above us, and we were able to look out far over the plains. Sunset was just approaching and to the west the clouds were tinged with scarlet and gold. From our height it seemed as though we were above them, and were looking down upon their bril-

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liance Everything was at peace, the plains, melting away into the darkness of the east and into the dim ruddiness which enveloped the west, lay as they must have done on the evening of the Creation

As we continued our journey the waxen white moon began to shine in the darkening sky, and before long our road was lit by its pale rays Behind us the great mass of the hills stood out blackly, while the road itself was speckled with whiteness where the light penetrated through the foliage of the overhanging trees When we reached the plains myriads of fireflies came out to dance for us, and the whole atmosphere seemed to sparkle with their fairy lights The air was warm and damp again, and we felt as though we had returned to India after a sojourn in a strange and happy land

## CHAPTER XIII

*We visit the Holy City of the Hindus, see the bathing and the burning ghats, and walk all over India*

WE had to return to Calcutta from Darjeeling, but we were soon off again on our travels. The steady labouring of the night train lulled us to sleep, and when we awakened next morning we were nearly in Benares. With a rumble and a clatter we lumbered over the broad Ganges, and caught a glimpse of the confused mass of palaces and temples which make the waterfront of the holiest of all Indian cities.

We had thought Calcutta dirty. We had not been in Benares more than a few hours before we knew that Calcutta was a miracle of cleanliness. Even our hotel in the cantonments had sucked up a certain amount of the city's squalidity, and its bare walls and depressing exterior sent our spirits down to a depth they had not reached since that first morning in Bangkok. Luckily our spirits are remarkably resilient, and after the first shock we grew too absorbed in the interest of the city for us to worry about minor details of environment. India may be dirty, but it is also mysteriously attractive, so that it is only in retrospect that we have time to think about its less pleasant aspects. That is why I cannot help feeling that those who write only about its unpleasant side are doing India a great injustice.

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Everyone knows about Benares. My own first knowledge of it came at an early age from a Sexton Blake thriller in which a Secret Service agent with the strong, silent name of Granite Grant accompanied the great detective through a myriad of breath taking adventures in its narrow streets and alleyways. Ever since then it had held me spellbound as one of the world's greatest centres of romance. Strangely enough actuality came up to expectation. Even to the Indian Benares must, I feel sure, be something of an enigma, for there is scarcely a corner that does not seem to reek of mystery. Here is Hinduism in all its forms, its colour, its superstition, its occultism and its esoteric ritual. Temple crowds on temple, sacred wells, statues and shrines appear round almost every corner, holy men in their hundreds sit by the roadside chanting passages from the sacred book, and holding out their begging bowls that merit may be gained by the charitable, while over everything rides a smothering atmosphere of darkness and of submission to a terrifying hierarchy of gods.

We visited many of these temples during our short stay. We never understood them in detail, but they gave us a glimpse into the dark regions of the Indian soul. It was not their dirt that appalled us, but rather their atmosphere of oppression and fear. The worshippers did not seem to be blessed with that peace that passeth all understanding which shines from the eyes of the happy religious. They came in fear and they crawled away in fear, and the priests who ministered to them were hard of eye and grasping of hand. The images of the gods were fearsome to behold, with faces which looked in all directions, and many hands which clutched and threatened, but never, never blessed.

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The temples themselves were small and airless, carved and decorated into a thousand interweaving forms, but strangely bereft of beauty. Through the low narrow doorways a stream of worshippers poured in and out, some bearing small gifts for the gods, fruit, sweetmeats and articles of jewellery, others leading their children to instruct them in the mysteries within. Little girls, the merest children, were carrying their babies—such skinny, underfed little mites!—to find favour with those on high, or to be cured of the sores which festered on their tiny bodies. From all India they came, pilgrims from the far south, from the villages of Bengal, from the broad acres of the Punjab, from the deserts of Rajputana, from the hills of Malabar; all of them obeying that telling impulse which calls every faithful Hindu to worship by the great bend of Holy Mother Ganges.

In all these temples we found but one single object which pierced the deep shroud separating our Western consciousness from what we saw. It was an image of the Sacred Bull of Siva lying life-size in the outer courtyard of one of the temples. It lay forward on its haunches, its head crooked slightly to one side, and its eyes rolling backwards as though to catch a glimpse of what lay behind. Nora immediately christened it, "Who said cows?"—which was very frivolous and improper, but possibly justified by the air of raffish insouciance which the artist had somehow contrived to convey; but it was scarcely fair, for this strange animal was more than just an image in stone. It possessed a strange mystery which we could never explain to ourselves. I can best describe it by saying that it *looked* sacred, which no live bull does. Standing before it we actually felt as though we were in



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the presence of an occult being which hid inside the dun-coloured stone. It was with something akin to a shiver that we turned away.

No other image affected us in this way. The hideous Durga was just so many arms and faces. Ganesh with his elephant's head was no more than a weak attempt at surrealist portraiture. The crude symbols of generation, which play such an essential part in Hindu theory, only disgusted us. But the Sacred Bull of Siva succeeded in piercing our imaginations, and establishing an anonymous point of contact between East and West.

Usually at the temples we were taken in charge by one of the priests—or so our guide told us, for we could see no way of distinguishing between priests and laymen. They were a ragged crowd, dressed in dirty *dhottis* or loin cloths, and bearing no insignia of office that we could determine. They all had one characteristic in common, however. They knew the value of the white tourist, and pursued us down the streets like beggars when our largesse was not considered sufficient.

"What is he saying?" I asked our guide of an elderly gentleman to whom I had given eight annas.

"Priests and beggars!" he replied with a laugh. "They are never satisfied. He says that even if you gave him a rupee there are so many priests in the temple that they would only get a pice each."

Doubtless this was a priestly exaggeration, but as there are sixteen annas in a rupee, four pices in an anna, and three pice in a pic, one can assume that priestcraft is one of the more popular professions among the Hindus.

The few temples we saw were varied in character. The

Durga Temple, for instance, was fairly open, and it was difficult to estimate whether there were more worshippers or monkeys in the courtyard. The latter were considered sacred, and waxed fat on the human desire to acquire merit by giving them food. Two priests accompanied us onto a balcony, where we were presented with a dish of nuts (for which we were charged an abnormal price) and given an opportunity of acquiring merit on our own account. It was not a lengthy process. Only a few seconds elapsed before the monkeys had made a clean sweep, and were once more climbing chattering over the carvings on the temple walls.

Durga, sometimes called Kali, was the wife of Siva, and this temple was closely related to the notorious Kalighat in Calcutta. In the courtyard there was a small stone pillar to which was attached an iron ring. The ground round it was stained a dull, rusty colour. Here goat sacrifices took place when women were anxious to present their husbands with fine, lusty sons. Fortunately the birth-rate was high during our visit, and there was no one trying to prod the gods into activity by donating a little warm goat's blood.

Not far off we found the Temple of Siva, known to the European visitor as the Golden Temple because two of its three towers were encased in gold-leaf. This had been done by a Maharaja who was anxious to acquire merit. He would doubtless have acquired still more merit if he had gilded the third tower in the same manner, but unfortunately the gods gathered him unto themselves while he was still in the middle of the work, and his heirs being less pious, did not continue it. This gives the Temple a rather lopsided appearance, but it does not matter greatly

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for the surrounding buildings press in on it so closely that it is practically impossible to see all the towers at once unless you climb up onto the roof of a nearby house

This was the most crowded temple of all, and the surge of people through its narrow doors never slackened for a moment. Well might it be so! For is not Siva the Destroyer, and, therefore, the most powerful of all the gods? Those skilled in the theory of Hinduism will tell you better, that he is merely one of the less important of the Hindu Trinity, but the man in the street knows that that is not so, and that the Destroyer is more important than He who created the world, or He who maintains it. Temple of Fear would be a better name than Golden Temple.

Later we paid a visit to the Cow Temple, where we were allowed to penetrate right into the inner shrine. The narrow space was filled with men and women at their devotions, while on the far side of a tank which stood in the centre sat a row of priests intoning prayers. A sacred calf moved here and there amongst the crowd, peacefully chewing the cud as though no such thing as the Hindu religion had ever been conceived. Above our heads a large number of pigeons—sacred pigeons—fluttered from wall to wall, and we had to keep alertly on the move to preserve our hats from being deluged with sacred excreta. No one else seemed to be particularly perturbed, even though they received a packet on their bare necks. Probably they looked on it as a sign of divine favour.

As we left this temple a fierce little man with a scarlet phallic caste mark on his forehead came pushing up to our guide, and exclaimed in angry English

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"Did you take them inside?"

I began to think that a religious riot was going to centre round us, but our guide, who was a Muslim, strode on with a superb gesture of contempt, and left him muttering by the way.

"Oh, he is just nobody," he said in answer to my question, but added as an afterthought that it might be wise to make a somewhat larger donation to the priest who had accompanied us. It is wonderful what money will do in India—and not very surprising when one sees the poverty. It is terribly easy to preserve one's standards when one's stomach is full.

We rose early next morning to see the famous bathing ghats. As we made our way down to the river bank we were surrounded by crowds of thousands, all streaming down to the water as English crowds stream to a football match. We did not follow them, but struck off into a narrow alleyway which brought us eventually to a steep, muddy bank at the foot of which we found a small wooden boat in which two cane chairs were standing. We took our seats, and were pulled out into the stream, feeling very much like two Rajas with their galley slaves.

The Benares waterfront is a magnificent sight with its many temples standing at the water's edge, and the palaces of India's Maharajas rising up behind. The buildings rise in tiers above one another, and create just such a confusing medley of rooftops as would delight the heart of René Clair. In the early morning when all Benares seems to have come down to enjoy the ceremonial bathe it is as virile as an ant-heap. The ghats are thick with people,

and in many places the water is more crowded than an Australian surfing beach on a Bank Holiday

As we were rowed along as close to the banks as the crowd would permit we had an admirable opportunity of watching the people at their devotions. Thousands of them came down into the filthy water, swimming in it, washing in it, laving it over their heads, even drinking it. Some seemed to be enjoying themselves, but others were bent wholly on piety and stood gravely motionless with their hands clasped in front of them, for all the world like revivalists undergoing baptism. Many of them must have been pilgrims come from far-off parts of India, and to them this immersion in the sacred waters must have been a holy, spiritual experience. Here and there we saw them strewing white flowers on the water's surface, probably an offering to the gods.

All ages were represented. There were little boys who were even less reverent than English children in church, and spent their time splashing each other and roaring with laughter, there were earnest young men who waded slowly out till the water was round their waists, and then ducked themselves piously before returning, there were middle aged men who stood intoning prayers, and there were wizened ancients with flowing white beards and only a few scraggy hairs on top of their heads, who quavered out and ducked themselves as though bathing at eighty was not the exclusive privilege of Mr Bernard Shaw.

The ghats were not continuous, but were broken here and there by buildings, bare stretches of muddy bank such as where we had picked up our boat, and very frequently by temples. Often these temples jutted right out

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into the river, and, passing close to them, we could see holy men squatting on their balconies, grimly fixing their eyes on the points of their noses as they meditated on the infinite. They never moved, seeming ignorant of all the life that was teeming round them. Time and again we passed them as we were rowed up and down, but never once did they change their attitude. They sat like stone figures, dead to the world in which their bodies lived, alive only to some mysterious, occult region of the soul.

Close by this vivid scene of life lies a scene of death—the burning ghats. The Hindus burn their dead—when-ever they can afford the wood, and the very necessary services of a priest. The poorest merely weight the bodies with stones, and give them to the river. Every city has its burning ghats, but in Benares they are put to more steady use, for it is considered a privilege to be allowed to die there, and old men and women come from all over India in order that they may breathe their last in its sacred atmosphere.

The ghats stand by the river, and as we drew near them the air was faintly laden with the stench of burning flesh, not altogether hidden by the sweet spices which accompanied the dead. We could see the flames licking up from a pile of wood towards a shapeless bundle swathed in white cotton. Half a dozen mourners stood by, while a priest wearing a cotton pad over his mouth and nose carefully stirred the wood with a long pole to make it burn better. In India the rhyme about no one caring to poke poor Willie would lose its point.

Dotted round the ghat several more funeral pyres had been prepared. Their gruesome white bundles lay on top

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of them looking very pale and forlorn under the glaring sun. As we drifted by we saw one ceremony begin. The chief mourner, probably the eldest son, leaned forward with a burning torch, and the flame licked its way like lightning over the dry wood. The mourner stood back, the priest came forward with his wooden poker, and the cremation was well in hand.

Public cremation of this kind is a little shocking to our western sense of propriety, but it is suitable for India where social taboos are different, though not less strict, and where the climate makes it a most suitable anticlimax to life. Hinduism is a magnificent religion in theory, but in its practise there is very little to be commended, unless it is this admirably sanitary method of disposing of the dead. The authorities certainly bless it, especially in Benares, for that city with its thousands of pilgrims come to die and its antiquated sewers would be a deathtrap for *all* who came to it if in the far-off past some Hindu leader had not discovered that fire is the finest disinfectant that the gods can provide.

On the previous day we had been surrounded at the hotel by a host of pedlars, conjurers and snake-charmers, and while Nora was examining some ivory beads (reputedly invaluable, but obviously made of bone) a furtive hand suddenly appeared from somewhere behind me, and thrust a packet of postcards into my lap, while at the same time a hoarse stage whisper warned me that they were "not for Memsahib." Paris could not have outvied them. They were photographs of carvings on a Benares temple, and were nothing if not frank. There is an interesting section in the Indian Criminal Law which

prohibits the production or sale of obscene pictures or photographs, "except in so far as they are intended for sacred or religious purposes," an exception which provides the postcard tout with an admirable excuse, and transforms every tourist into an archaeologist. I examined the postcards, but did not buy them, thereby getting the best of both worlds.

This morning I was treated to another similar display. Our boat pulled in at some steps reaching down to the water, and the guide informed me that there was a temple a few yards away which I would find very interesting, although it was "not quite suitable for Memsahib". Leaving Nora enthroned in solitary glory on her cane chair, I stumbled after the guide, who led me up the steps and through a tortuous maze of damp, stinking alleyways until we finally arrived at the small square temple we sought.

The priest came out in answer to the guide's hail. Then, seeing that I was a European, he disappeared again, returning a few moments later with a long bamboo wand. This he used as a pointer as he led us round the temple walls, thus making sure that I received my full money's worth, and did not miss the slightest indiscretion. The guide, too, was anxious that I should miss nothing, and insisted on gilding the lily by describing each carving as we came to it, and telling me, with a certain amount of biological detail, just what it was supposed to represent. The carvings were crude, obscene and revolting, but it was worth seeing them just for the sake of the guide's commentary. Perhaps one of his best efforts came when the priest pointed to a small group of three figures.



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"One man, he use woman," the guide explained  
"Other man, he say, 'Hurry up, please' "

I loved that "please"

Though the guide insisted that these carvings had no connection with the Hindu religion, but had simply been placed there because the builder of the Temple, a long-dead Maharaja of Nepal, had been of a very "joyful" disposition, I beg leave to doubt it. Hinduism venerates life, and all that goes to the creation of it. Doubtless a "joyful" disposition makes good use of this aspect of theology, and carries it to its logical extreme, but that does not mean that the religious side ceases to exist. Any way, why choose a temple for your exhibitions of "joyfulness" when you have all the walls of your palace as a medium for the licentiousness of your erotic artists? No! If the burning ghats were a good advertisement for Hinduism, the little Nepalese temple behind them was not.

On our way back to the hotel for breakfast we stopped to see an undenominational temple of a novel kind. It was modern, being still uncompleted, and expressed vividly the new spirit which is trying to weld the Indian masses into a single nation. It is known as the Temple of Mother India, and will be open to all who wish to worship there, irrespective of creed, colour or caste. It is airy and open, strangely unlike the poky little places we had visited on the previous day, and almost severely classical in its design. Round its walls maps of India have been carved in bas relief, showing the distribution of religions, races, populations and other statistical facts, while sunk in the floor in the centre there is a relief map of India carved out of white marble.

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Anyone who dares to suggest that craftsmanship is dead in India should go to see that map. It is one of the most remarkable achievements that modern India has to show. Fifteen feet square, it seemed as though all India lay there spread out below our feet, an India of glistening white surrounded by a deep blue sea. Ahead of us the giants of the Himalayas towered up above the flat plains of the Ganges. We could follow the whole course of the great river with our eyes, right from its twisting source in the heart of the mountains to Calcutta in Bengal. The Brahmaputra was there, too, winding its way through the highlands of Tibet, while to our left the five great rivers of the Punjab converged together, and flowed down the channel of the mighty Indus to the sea. Down the Peninsula the Eastern and the Western Ghats seemed but faint eruptions compared with the Himalayas to the north, while almost at our feet the island of Ceylon lay as a worthy pendant to the whole.

The Indian professor who had spent fifteen years in supervising the construction of this map happened to be there at the time of our visit, and he invited us to come down and make a more careful survey. In our stocking soles we strode from Karachi to Calcutta, from Bombay to Delhi, marvelling at the intricacy of the work, while our host told us the story of its building.

Fifteen years ago he had conceived the idea. After making a collection of survey maps of the whole country he had reduced them to a scale of sixty-four miles to the foot, carefully marking on them the altitudes for every hundred feet above sea level. Having thus produced a map some fifteen feet square, he had it cut into sections, each a foot square. The map was carved in sections

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correspondingly large, the squares being divided amongst twenty skilled workmen who laboured for six years before they saw their task completed.

The altitude scale adopted was 2,000 feet to the inch. The Himalayas presented the worst problem of all, for over 450 separate peaks had to be carved, each to its correct scale. Nor was the sea forgotten, and all round the land the marble has been hollowed out to its correct depth, so that the surrounding islands are all shown.

So well had the work been completed that when the "sea" was filled with water it lapped the shore evenly on all sides, while a few drops poured on the source of any river, would eventually find their way down the correct channel to the "sea".

Here was a novelty which future generations will look on with admiration and respect, if not with wonder, just as we to-day stare with amazement at the fine achievements of our ancestors, and wonder how they accomplished them. It is rarely that one sees the birth of a work of art which one knows will endure into far-off ages when we ourselves will be forgotten, and even most of those who to us seem the great kings and captains of our time.

## CHAPTER XIV

*We pass from Hindudom into Islam, see the flag that is never struck, and are introduced to the art of buying scent*

THE journey from Benares to Lucknow lasts about five hours. It was the first time we had travelled by day, and so we were able to feast ourselves on Indian scenery. Not that there was a great deal to see. We were still on the great plains, and for as far as the eye could reach the earth stretched in a long, vast expanse towards the horizon, with only an occasional huddled village to break the monotony. Here and there ragged watercourses had cut deep clefts into the soil, but in general there was only the immense panorama of scrubbily cultivated fields to be seen.

These fields, separated only by rough ditches, helped to explain India's astonishing poverty. Cultivation was so poor that scarcely anything seemed to grow in quantity. Whole acres would lie empty, while many of the fields were covered so scraggily with their crops that it almost seemed as though some blight had fallen on them. Agriculture is one of the country's greatest weaknesses. It is so deeply bound up with tradition and ceremonial usages which have lost their point that the authorities find it all but impossible to persuade the peasants to adopt modern methods. They prefer the customs of their fathers, and shun everything that smacks of modernity. They will not even use cow-dung to manure their fields. Rice, they

say, must be cooked over a fire of cow-dung, and so they plaster the walls of their huts with it, turning them into evil-smelling coal-cellars, and burning up the very life of their country because their fathers have done so from the beginnings of time.

Still the peasant is not the only one to blame. This is not the place to discuss India's agrarian problem, but it is only fair to note that if the farmer is stubborn in refusing to change his methods, the land is equally stubborn in insisting on an outrageous rent, the priest in draining away the money which ought to be put into the land, the money-lender in gaining a stranglehold on every single acre, and the lawyer in exploiting the peasant's natural tendency towards possessiveness.

There is nothing simple in India. Every problem assumes a complexity that involves the whole population.

In Benares we had made use of the hotel car, and had found ourselves presented with a bill which staggered us, and made a serious hole in our finances. We vowed there and then that we would adopt a less expensive method of travel, and on arriving in Lucknow we sent off Mahmoud to find us a nice tonga. The tonga is India's jaunting-car. The driver sits in front, and the passengers behind him, facing backwards. Two big wheels support the whole vehicle, which is as light as a baby-carriage. Overhead an awning keeps off the Indian sun. It is a slow method of progress after a car, but its leisureliness fits in well with the lazy tempo of the East, and after that first ride in Lucknow we scarcely ever saw the inside of an Indian motor car again.

What a difference from Benares! Once again our hotel

was in the cantonments, but it was clean and fresh, and its surroundings untainted by squalor and dirt. This was not because it was removed further from the town. It was because the whole atmosphere was different, because Lucknow was not a Holy City dedicated to the esoteric mysteries of Hinduism.

European travellers in India nearly always praise the Muslims and decry the Hindus. It is a natural thing to do, for Mohammedanism is closer to our own religion, and easier to understand. It was not bred in the hot and sultry plains, but in the broad deserts of Asia Minor where life is a struggle against other men, and not against the lassitude of a deadly climate; those same deserts which saw the birth of our own religion. Its architecture, which is, after all, the outward and visible sign through which an alien religion impresses itself on those who cannot understand its mysteries, is free and open and glorious, and more in accord with what we consider pure.

Yet the Muslims are not deserving of the benefit of the comparison of architecture. They have kept the form of their religion, but not its spirit. The Indian climate defiles all that it touches, and Allah has been reinforced with a host of minor deities who prey upon the superstitious poor just as the tribes of Hindu gods prey upon the Hindus. The two religions have grown very close together by this time. Though communal rioting is one of the customary troubles of India, the antipathies which arouse it do not spring from a religious source. It is political in its entirety, and, though fostered by the priesthood on either side, it has certainly no spiritual end in view.

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If Lucknow, a Muslim city, appeals more to the European eye than does the Benares of Hinduism, it is not because the Muslims are better men or better citizens. It is because the Muslim conquerors of old did not have time to lose their vitality to the Indian sun before they built the city and its mosques. This can be said of all Northern India, for Indian history is nothing but a series of conquests and declines. Civilizations arose, and then sank into corruption. Fresh blood kept pouring in from beyond the Khyber. The Muslims were the last of the Asiatic conquerors to fight their way over the mountains before Great Britain opened a new highroad across the sea, but to-day only the relics of their greatness remain. They themselves have been absorbed as were the conquerors before them, and the conquerors before them, back to the very beginnings of man.

Lucknow was the capital of the great Kingdom of Oudh, whose rulers broke away from the suzerainty of the Mogul Emperor, and created their own powerful state. It still bristles with the magnificent buildings which belong to the time before the virility of the newcomers had been completely sucked away. No wonder that they make the city seem a place of glorious beauty and purity after the congested, squalid temples of Benares. These buildings are not old. Just over a hundred years ago the Kingdom of Oudh was at the height of its glory, and masons and architects were busy perpetuating the magnificence of the King. Yet they belong to a world which might have existed a million years ago for all it has in common with Europe. Suddenly to drive in amongst them seated on the back of an Indian tonga is to be translated into the magnificence of the Arabian Nights,

and to lose all touch with the drab semblance of reality.

The Great Imambara, the Husainabad Imambara, the Jami Masjid, the Kaiserbagh, the Shah Najaf, they all create an atmosphere so gloriously unreal, so fertile for the imagination, that it is impossible to view them as just so many buildings. One erects a structure of romance around them, and peoples them with strange but living figures. Perhaps that is the true function of architecture—to embalm the spirit of an age in stone, so that the future will know the glories of the past. If it is, then these Muslim builders must have been amongst the greatest architects of all time.

I do not propose to describe these buildings one by one. *The pictures on other pages will give you some idea* of the slender minarets and the great domes bellying up towards the sky. They will make you feel a little of what we felt as we saw them there with the flawless blue sky behind them and the sun outlining them in shadow on the ground. Alas! They cannot tell you how the lofty ceilings arch inside them, nor how the great emptiness of the mosques reaches nearer to the mystery of the universe than the squalid surplusage of the Hindu Temples, or of many of our own Churches. The Mohammedans have learned a truth which very few theologians have yet discovered, or, if they have discovered it, cannot put into practise—that God will only make his presence known where there is simplicity and purity, not only in the heart, but in the environment as well. In these mosques one can sense the long starlit nights of the Arabian deserts where it is given to man to glimpse eternity and grasp the infinite for a fleeting second. Truly they belong far



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more to the home of Islam than to the Ganges valley

June, 1857 The disastrous retreat from Chinhath, the hurried gathering of stores, the frenzied erection of pallisades, the preparation of bastions and redoubts, the sudden death of Sir Henry Lawrence

Down in the quiet graveyard we found his memorial, and, reading the simple inscription,

HERE LIES  
SIR HENRY LAWRENCE  
WHO TRIED TO DO HIS DUTY  
MAY GOD HAVE MERCY ON HIS SOUL

we felt that here was one of those few spots where great deeds have left their mark for ever

Whatever we may have to be ashamed of in Indian history, it is not the story of the siege of Lucknow. The courage and endurance of that tiny garrison, which held its own against overwhelming forces for eighty seven days until the first relief, deserves to go down in the book of history along with the greatest deeds of all time. To day there is little left to remind the visitor of the ordeal, except the ruined buildings which stand out naked against the sky. The earth that was once scarred with shot and tramped hard and bare by hurrying footsteps in the dark is a pleasant medley of green lawns and flaming flower beds. The flag which waves gently above the Residency is not torn and ragged as it once was, nor is it a symbol of military pomp, but rather a sentimental memory fragrant far less of national pride than of national

homage. They never strike that flag. Contrary to all military usage it is kept flying through the night. It is a fitting tribute to the men and women who kept their courage just as high.

Try to imagine what that siege was like. India in the days of the Mutiny was not closely knit by rail, road, telegraph and wireless as it is now. It took weeks to travel from town to town, and the small bands of Europeans clustered here and there from Bombay to Calcutta were separated by the greatest barrier Nature has ever contrived—the barrier of distance. For their safety and defence they relied largely on native levies drawn from the Kingdoms and provinces they had conquered, and when these levies mutinied and rejected the alien suzerainty of the White Man, they were as lonely as the little groups of palm-trees in the desert. If they did not realize their danger at once, the story of events in Cawnpore where the whole garrison, having surrendered, was massacred taught them what to expect.

There was no hope of immediate help for the people in Lucknow. The nearby garrisons were too busy defending themselves to come to their rescue, while the troops from the coast would have to fight their way through hundreds of miles of hostile country before they could reach them. There was scarcely any news, and even that was little more than rumour. The rebels clung so closely round the defences that it was only very occasionally that messengers were able to get through. It was just a question of waiting for the future to show its hand.

The dead and wounded grew in numbers every day. Cholera and smallpox reared their ugly heads. Rations began to run short. Daily it grew more difficult to man

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the defences, while the stench of the corpses outside made the air putrid. Children were born in the dark underground rooms where the women sheltered—and died because there was no milk for them. And every day the whole garrison suffered more and more from the bitter, gnawing sickness of hope deferred.

But they never gave in. Night and day they manned their posts, and even found time to make sorties out to spike the enemy's guns. For eighty seven days they resisted every attack until at last General Havelock and his column smashed his way through the rebel lines to their relief. Even then they had to face further weary weeks of siege before they could finally escape.

What kept them fighting? Honour? Pride of country? Fear for their womenfolk? No one of these things, nor yet all of them. As the siege closed in they must have ceased to be just British, and become simply men and women faced with a challenge there was no mistaking. Grimly and doggedly they held their own, simply because each man and woman there knew that they must not fail. Not for the British Empire, not for Queen and country, not even for the sake of their own lives—but for each one's personal integrity.

And so with the relieving force. They did not march these hundreds of weary miles under the burning tropical sun for the sake of their Empire, or for the sake of greater glory. They marched to relieve their comrades in distress. For once the greed of Empire was dulled, the keen edge of imperialism blunted. They could have waited for reinforcements from England if that was all they had in mind. As it was, they relieved the garrison only to abandon Lucknow to the rebels.

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To-day the Residency is a place of peace. The flowers bloom in a glorious riot of colour just as though men had not fallen there. Grass grows on the floor of the great banquet hall which became the hospital, and where men suffered untold agonies before they died. The Residency Building has become a small museum of souvenirs. It lies at peace, enjoying a grand old age, rich in its memories, and honoured by the new world whose birth it ushered in.

An old soldier is in charge. He has walked straight from the pages of Kipling, and now, retired from active service, he keeps watch and ward over his kingdom, escorting the tourists, and proudly telling the old story over and over again.

And how he tells it! *Half a century's absence from the London streets* have not robbed him of his hall-mark. Pearlies and old-fashioned music-halls flash before your eyes as you listen to him, and the Old Kent Road seems only just round the corner.

"Yus, that larst King of Oudh was a wrong un. We deposed 'im because 'e wouldn't be 'ive 'imself. 'E 'ad three 'undred and fifty wives. Kept 'em in the Kaiserbagh Palace over there, 'e did."

Or:

"This 'ere wood 'as bin 'ere hever since heighdeen 'undred."

And, to finish up:

"Thankee, sir. I ham a bit dry."

The Indian city lies to the south of the cantonments. Like every other Indian quarter it is a maze of congested streets, which wind narrow, tortuous courses amongst the

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buildings No vehicles are allowed inside it, as they would only make confusion worse confounded, and we had perforce to leave our tonga at the gate, and wander through on foot We were not without an object in our visit Almost every Indian city is famous for something, Benares for its brocades, Delhi for its brass and silver, Udaipur for its enamels Lucknow has gained a reputation for perfumes, and we were anxious to take some back to England with us In the hotel they would not let us alone, producing a new perfume almost every time we appeared, but we wanted to buy it in the bazaars, partly for economical reasons, and partly because we had heard that the perfumiers' shops had to be seen to be believed

We did not know where we were going, but headed down the main street, which for an Indian city was a broad thoroughfare very nearly ten yards wide, and running comparatively straight It was crowded with people, but we were the only Europeans

The city seemed far cleaner than Benares There were smells a plenty, and poverty and beggars were to be seen on all sides, but it was not oppressive The people seemed happier, and less anxious to carry all the cares of the world on their shoulders They looked at us curiously as we passed, but that air of hostility we had come to know in Calcutta was conspicuously absent

Both sides of the street were lined with tiny hole in the wall shops, in each of which the shopkeeper sat on the floor with a number of his friends, all happily doing nothing That is an art we must learn to cultivate in the West I have often felt since this journey in the East that a wise dictator with a vision beyond guns and submarines might achieve a great deal by making his people

do nothing for two hours every day. If it achieved nothing else it would at least improve our digestions.

We were keeping our eyes open for a perfume shop, but we had walked over half a mile before we found one. It was not very easily recognizable. In Europe we associate perfumes with quaint little bottles in silvered boxes that call up visions of fashionable evening gowns and languidly lovely ladies. This shop we found in the Chauk in Lucknow was just like the others surrounding it, except that it was slightly larger. It opened directly on to the street, and did not even boast a door. Shutters could be put up at night to protect the costly perfumes from thieves. The floor was raised some two feet above street level, and a counter about a foot high ran across it. There were no tiny bottles, but on the back shelves there were ranged a series of large containers rather like those you see at the back of a chemist's shop.

Yet this was one of the greatest perfumiers in India with an unrivalled overseas connection. Haji Abdul Aziz is known all over the world, and the great perfumiers of London and Paris and New York come to him for their wares. Mr. Aziz himself was sitting cross-legged on the floor as we climbed into the shop, and, rising, he hurriedly sent off two of his assistants, one of them for chairs to accommodate the Europeans who did not know the true art of sitting, and the other for an interpreter. Soon we were being initiated into the elaborate ceremonial of buying perfume.

Nora and I sat side by side on our chairs, while Mr. Aziz squatted on the other side of the counter with the interpreter on one side of him, and an assistant on the other. We glanced through his catalogue, which was

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written in English as well as Indian, and, finally picking on Attar of Roses, asked if we could sample some Mr Aziz gave directions to the assistant, who took down one of the large glass bottles, and placed it in front of him Then he handed him some bamboo sticks, and a little cotton wool With these Mr Aziz fashioned a little mop, and, opening the bottle, dusted the stopper with it Then he passed it on to Nora, who snuffed it, while he prepared another little mop for me

We expressed our praise to the interpreter, who translated it to Mr Aziz, who bowed his head in acknowledgment and ordered another bottle to be brought to him The ceremony was repeated several times, each perfume being as lovely as the last, until we had made up our minds on what we wanted Our purchases were then poured into tiny glass bottles which were sealed with wax and passed over to us as though they were precious drops of gold All this time Mr Aziz behaved as though he was engaged in some mysterious religious ritual, maintaining a solemn dignity

Before leaving we asked for the Kush scent, which is a favourite amongst the Indians It was produced, and the little cotton wool mops dusted with it We put them to our noses, and pulled them back in a hurry The scent was a strangely bitter one that caught in the nostrils and made us wrinkle up our noses For the first and only time Mr Aziz unbent from his dignity, and behind his calm expression we could detect a twinkle of amusement Our own dignity vanished as well, and we laughed He laughed back, and the interpreter laughed, and the two assistants laughed, and so ended our visit to the perfumier of Lucknow

## CHAPTER XV

*We enter the land of the Great Moguls, stand spell-bound  
before the beauty of the Taj Mahal, and wander through  
the streets of a deserted city*

WE shared our carriage from Lucknow to Agra with an Indian gentleman, who proved a delightful companion. He was a Marwa from Jodhpur, and was on his way home for a month's holiday from Calcutta, where he was in business as a stockbroker. A Hindu, he treated us to a virulent exposure of Muslim intrigue, and a profound defence of everything Hindu—even of child-marriage, which he said was due entirely to the Muslims. In the early days of conquest, he said, they had been great epicureans in the matter of women, and would not carry off a girl unless she was a virgin. To protect their women-folk the Hindus quickly married them off as soon as they grew to an attractive age, and the custom had stuck. It was an ingenious method of passing the buck, but not altogether satisfactory.

He was really a most charming old gentleman, and made the journey pass quickly by carrying on a political monologue which ranged from these Muslim depravities to the equally entertaining depravities of the British. What he said is out of place in this book, but how he said it is worthy of note, for bitterness never once entered into his voice. He merely recited his facts and his conclusions,



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and smiled very beautifully, as much as to say "Well, that's what I think about it 'Take it or leave it'"

However, in spite of his denunciations of Islam he could bring himself to admire certain aspects of it. As we were drawing near our journey's end he pulled up the screen on the window of the sunny side of the compartment, and said with the air of a conjurer producing rabbits from a hat

"And now, my friends, I shall show you the most beautiful building in the world"

There, just across the river, it lay shimmering in the heat, its marble walls and domes and minarets a brilliant white beneath the sun. We caught only a glimpse of it. A few seconds later the train rumbled on to the railway bridge, and it disappeared round the bend of the river.

We went to see it that night when the moon was high up in the sky. So much has been written and sung about the Taj Mahal that it seems almost invidious to add to it, but it is so lovely, so perfect, that no book about India can be complete without it.

Our tonga drew up at the gateway to the Taj gardens. We jumped down, and passed inside. Then we saw it, and we stopped spellbound.

Before us stretched a long narrow reflecting pool flanked with tall cedar trees which cast long black shadows in the moonlight. Beyond that lay a massive raised marble platform, in the centre of which the Taj raised itself proudly in the air. In the half light of the moon it seemed dim and mysterious, scarcely real. It was more like the wraith of a building come back to haunt the site it had once occupied on earth. Its rounded dome caught and reflected back the moonlight, so did

the doorway and the minarets. But it was not a pure white light it reflected back to us, but rather a dull, unpolished light such as one associates with mist. It seemed to float there, unsubstantial, ghostly, unreal.

The great scenes of this world, the Grand Canyon or the snows of Darjeeling, have not been fashioned by man; they are the products of Nature herself, who can plan and fashion on a gigantic scale. Here Nature supplied only the moonlight. The rest was made by man, and made so exquisitely, with so much care and with so much beauty, that it seemed far purer than anything blind chance might devise.

Now that the moment and the mood are past it is not possible to live it all again on the cold keys of a typewriter. I can only say that all time seemed to be concentrated into these few moments during which we gazed down the reflecting pool. Such moments come rarely, and it takes a supreme artistry to call them into being. It is only once or twice in a lifetime that one encounters a vision so compelling that it rivets the whole mind, the whole imagination, to a fleeting second, binds it so securely that nothing else seems to exist, nothing else ever to have been.

We stood there and stared for what may have been a moment, may have been an hour. I do not know. At last the spell broke, and we began to move forward towards the building. It was a silly thing to do. We should have turned our backs, and gone away for ever to keep that picture in our minds, unbroken and untainted.

The Taj gardens are used as a pleasure ground by the people of Agra, and we soon found ourselves in the midst of a milling crowd of pleasure-seekers who wandered

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this way and that amongst the trees and shrubs, and sauntered round and round the building itself. Soon we fell victims to the commercial instinct, and were surrounded by touts who tried to drag us inside the tomb and show us the "sights." Valiantly we resisted them, but the mood was gone, and we felt that the world was too much with us. On the great marble platform hundreds of children were playing, laughing, screaming, chasing each other. It was nice to see that in India, but not here. I had done the same myself when I was small, playing tag round the Albert Memorial, but the cases were scarcely similar, and we cursed the authorities for allowing such desecration. As we walked away, we turned once more at the gateway, and looked back. There it was, just as we had seen it when we entered, floating as light as gossamer in the moonlit night.

Of course the Taj has had its critics. Aldous Huxley was one. He declared it cheap and tawdry, badly proportioned and grossly overrated. But then he only saw it in the daytime, when the harsh Indian sun, which spares little, was doing its worst. Next morning we returned, and could find little of what had so entranced us on the previous evening. The Taj was still beautiful, but it was not magnificent. The four minarets at the corners seemed shockingly out of place. They were too thick and squat, and would have been better placed in the English Channel as a warning to shipping. The marble was no longer a pure white, but streaked and grained with black. The commercialists were in even fuller force, and we found it impossible to withstand their importunities. Unwilling captives we went inside, and dutifully listened to the echoes in the dome, placed money in the appropriate

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places for "good luck", and admired what we were told to admire.

But even then there was much to linger over. The exquisite marble screen surrounding the tombs of Shah Jahan and his wife, which was carved into a lace-like texture; the Persian inscriptions inlaid in jet round the massive doorway; the marble carvings of flowers which adorned all the walls; all these were worth crossing India to see, but none of them was equal to the vision of loveliness we had seen on the previous night.

There are many legends of how the Taj Mahal came to be built, and probably none of them are wholly true. I like this one the best of all, although it seems even less authentic than the rest. It was told me by an Indian archæologist who had spent his life rummaging through his country's immense past, and who was fully convinced of its accuracy.

Shah Jahan, he said, was playing chess one day with his favourite wife, Mutmaz-i-Mahal. He was proud of his knowledge of the game, and he usually won. On this occasion, however, Mutmaz-i-Mahal showed her tactlessness by beating him. She expected him to be angry, but he loved her so much that he was delighted that she should win, and declared there and then that he would fulfil any desire that she cared to express.

"I would ask," she replied in answer to this offer, "that even though I should die you shall continue to love me for ever."

"Should Allah decree that you shall die before me," declared the Emperor, "I shall build you a monument such as shall endure throughout the ages for so long as our love shall endure."

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Eventually Mutmaz i Mahal died (which was really not at all surprising, for she had given her husband fourteen children in just as many years), and Shah Jahan set out to fulfil his pledge. The result was the Taj Mahal. Now, our friend's theory was this, that he remembered the circumstances under which the pledge was given, and, picking out the King from his chessmen, he gave it to the architect, telling him to base the tomb's design on it.

The only flaw in this theory of the genesis of the design is that the Taj is not based on the King at all, but, if on any particular piece, on the Elephant, which is the Indian equivalent of the Rook.

Nevertheless, it is a good story.

The Mogul Emperors were the last to rule all India before the British Conquest. It was in the north that their rule was strongest and it is there that the greatest of their memorials remain. Agra, which was their Capital for many years, is rich in their buildings. The Taj, the Fort, Akbar's tomb at Sikandra and the long deserted city of Fatehpur Sikri all testify to the magnificence in which they lived, and to their prodigality in the realm of architecture.

The Fort is massive, surrounded on all sides by immense sandstone walls nearly seventy feet high. These walls were built by Akbar, but the buildings inside belong mostly to the time of Shah Jahan who built with a lavish frenzy, and left the exchequer so impoverished on his death that the collapse of the Empire was already in sight.

I am not going to describe this Fort, for in Delhi there is another which is infinitely more lovely, but I cannot resist a word or two about the Mosque which is famed all

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over the world as one of the most sacred places of Islam. It is known as the Moti Masjid, or Pearl Mosque, and, like the Taj, is built almost entirely of marble.

You enter it by climbing a long flight of dark steps, which emerge suddenly into the dazzling brightness of the courtyard, but before you are allowed to cross the threshold you must let the caretaker tie large, unwieldy slippers over your shoes. This is really a great concession on the part of the Muslims. Actually you should not enter at all without taking off your shoes, but as Europeans are known to be abnormally delicate in matters of this nature, the authorities have agreed to waive the point provided that they cover up their impious footwear.

Thus shod you may walk out over the marble floor. The courtyard is over fifty yards square, and is paved entirely with marble. In the centre there is a tank which is used for ceremonial washings, while to one side of it there is a small sundial, but otherwise it is completely empty. The Mosque proper stands at the north end, and reaches almost the whole width of the court. It has neither walls nor doorways to prevent the curious from looking inside, and, even though it had, there would be nothing for the curious to see. That is the whole point of a mosque. It contains nothing to distract the eye from worship. It is perfectly simple, and even the shrine at the back is nothing but an empty alcove.

It is about twenty feet deep, and a hundred and twenty feet long. Three rows of six pillars each divide it into arches, and as the inside is all shaded the glare of the marble is mellowed down to a pleasant gloom. Only in one respect is its simplicity relieved. On the outside there is a little decoration, single flowers on long, slender,

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curving stalks are carved in bas relief. They are certainly not the type of work to draw anyone from his devotions. They are so exquisite and simple that they add to, rather than detract from, the graceful dignity of the building as a whole.

Three domes surmount the mosque, of which the middle one is the largest, while along the front are a number of admirably proportioned cupolas. Along the façade an inscription picked out in jet in the white marble tells that the builder was the Emperor, Shah Jahan, and adds that the Mosque is like a "precious pearl." Northern India is filled with Mosques, magnificent buildings raised to the honour and glory of Allah, who is the only God, but of them all there is not one to compare in beauty, in simplicity, or in its atmosphere of spiritual peace, with the Moti Masjid of the Agra Fort.

For sheer wonderment value, however, both the Taj and the Fort are made to seem small by the city of Fatehpur Sikri which lies some twenty miles to the west of Agra. If it were in England it would be known as Akbar's Folly, for it has all the pathetic loneliness of a splendid failure to achieve the impossible.

Akbar built the whole city for a whim. He set up magnificent palaces and mosques and audience halls, gathered a massive city round them, and surrounded that city with a stout wall. But he forgot one thing—a most important thing in India—the water supply. For seven years, at immense cost and effort, the city was kept supplied with water, but eventually the venture had to be confessed a failure, the Court returned to Agra, and the

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busy streets and magnificent buildings were allowed to fall into neglect and decay. To-day only a few villagers live under the crumbling walls, and make their living by escorting tourists round the ruins of past Mogul magnificence.

Akbar's wife was childless, which was a great grief to him, as he wished to be able to pass his mighty Empire on to a son. It happened that a Muslim Saint who lived on a small hill twenty miles from Agra heard of this, and he came to Akbar, saying that he could make the woman bear him a son. Let Akbar just send her to the Saint's cave to live there for a year under his supervision, and his magic would destroy her barrenness. Akbar accepted the proposal, and the lady went to live with the Saint, and, sure enough, though perhaps not very surprisingly, she was brought to bed with child, and presented the Emperor with a lusty young son who was later to rule India in his stead.

Akbar was delighted, so delighted that he announced his intention of himself going to live in the place where the Saint had wrought this miracle. When it was pointed out that the Saint lived in a tiny cave in the hillside he brushed the objection aside, and declared that he would build a city there for himself. Stone and timber had to be brought from immense distances, but the Moguls were inveterate builders. Akbar did not allow himself to be discouraged, but sent his best architects and builders to the barren site. In an incredibly short space of time the city of Fatehpur Sikri reared its massive buildings high above the surrounding plains.

The modernistic explanation of the miracle which brought Jahangir, Akbar's son, into the world seems to



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be borne out by modern conditions, for if one is to believe the few villagers who still live in the deserted city, the Saint, Shaikh Salim Chisti, was a man of abounding fertility. They all claim to be descended from him. No sooner had we arrived than a guide presented himself to us. He was a venerable old Muslim with a white beard and greying hairs which hung scraggly down the back of his neck, and he presented for our inspection a Government chit which said that he was *supposed* to be descended from the Saint. During our tour of the city he showed us the graves of 'my ancestors', an immense number of them arranged in genealogical order, and proudly pointed to the vacant plot, "where I shall lie some day"

All through the afternoon he kept telling us about his ancestors who seemed to have preceded him as guide through many generations. From them he had learned a profound contempt for archaeologists, and he was always at great pains to expose the fallacies in the guide books. He was interested in the future of his family also, and introduced us to his son, and to his granddaughter, aged only two months.

Fatehpur Sikri is indeed deserted. But for the Palace buildings and the Mosque all the houses and bazaars have crumbled into dust. Even the Palace is but a skeleton. The stone remains, the life has gone, the courts are empty, the buildings forlorn. Though the Government has done much to restore the ravages of time, it cannot bring back the people who made the Palace live. Unveiled ladies no longer sit down the purdah galleries, screened by their high walls from peeping eyes, Akbar no longer plays with the ladies of his seraglio in the Ankh Michauli, nor

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does he play Pachisi in the great court with gaily-dressed slave-girls for his pieces; in the Hall of Private Audience the sages of three continents no longer gather to expound their solutions of the mystery of the universe; the baths are empty; no polo is played on the fields below the terrace. Nothing is left but faint lingering memories, soft shadows cast along the avenues of time.

Looking down from the terrace one can see the fatal waterworks, a defiant gesture against the hostility of the Indian plains. Stepped up by slow degrees from a shallow lake lying half a mile away, a series of tanks rise up towards the Palace. Water was transferred from one tank to the next by means of buckets and waterwheels, until it had been brought high enough to be serviceable. Unfortunately the lake did not hold enough water to satisfy Akbar's imperial taste. He kept up great Turkish baths, and every night after he had retired to bed he would have his room flooded a foot deep to keep it cool. Though he did his best to avoid waste by rarely actually drinking water, it was not long till the lake had dried up, and left the Palace of his dreams useless and unserviceable.

Perhaps the most interesting building is the Diwan-i-Khas, the Hall of Private Audience. It is small, about twenty-five feet square. In the centre rises a large, intricately carved sandstone pillar. A gallery runs round the four walls about half the height of the hall, and from the four corners four subsidiary galleries reach out to the top of the pillar. Various stories are told about it. Some say that Akbar would sit on top of the pillar with his four chief Ministers of State stationed at the four corners of the gallery, while the common people, come to seek

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justice, would stand below. Others say that it was here that Akbar would receive in audience those philosophers and savants whom he summoned from all the corners of the earth to explain to him the inner secrets of their religions. He would sit on the pillar, while they would discourse from below. "My Ancestors," however, would have none of these explanations.

"What I say," he explained, "is that Akbar no have four faces. He is not able to speak to four men in four corners at once. What my ancestors say is this, that on the platform on top of the pillar there was an idol with four faces, one face looking to each corner. Each day Akbar come to worship each face, one from each corner. He was not a strict Mohammedan. He had a Hindu wife as well as a Mohammedan wife, and a Christian wife as well. He belonged to all the religions, and he worshipped all the gods."

Certainly Akbar was not very orthodox. He was a great dreamer as well as a great man of action, and, though he was completely illiterate, he possessed the greatest library of books in the Orient from which he would have selections read to him every day. He was a mystic too, and dreamed of founding a new religion himself, a religion which would take all the good points of the many religions then existing, and weld them into something at once novel and enduring. Where he failed was that he could not discipline his actions to keep pace with his principles, but the world is none the less richer for his life, for dreamers, even though they fail, give the past that vision of better things without which the future would decay.

In Fatehpur Sikri one can enter into that strange world



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of long ago when India was still a land of Oriental magnificence, and had not yet suffered from contact with the West. In the later afternoon, when the sun, no longer glaring as it does at midday, casts long shadows across the courtyards, and lights the red sandstone of the buildings with a strangely vivid glow of life, it almost seems as though ghosts are waiting behind the shadowed nooks to spring out once more and live the life to which they belonged. We spent many hours there, wandering amongst the buildings accompanied by "My Ancestors" who told us stories of the past, and explained to us how to put that great empty jig-saw puzzle together, so that we could see it as it once had been.

The picture was astonishingly clear. Figures flitted from the shadows one by one until the whole Palace was filled with men and women dressed in gorgeous robes and uniforms. Soldiers, priests, servants, messengers, slave-girls, grooms, politicians, rulers of distant provinces—a brilliant assemblage with Akbar himself the centre of them all, administering justice to his people, bathing in his Turkish bath, inspecting his stud of horses in the gigantic stables, relaxing in the Panch Mahal, the five-storied skyscraper where his women lived, playing a reckless game of polo on the flat fields below, taken up with the affairs of his Empire in his private apartments. And then the dying sun slipped down behind the horizon, and the Palace died as well. The glow deserted the walls, the figures faded into thin air, and there was only dead stone around us, and "My Ancestors" haggling for bak-sheesh. He did not have to haggle for long. In spite of his genealogical tree and his anathemas against the guide-books, he had succeeded in making this deserted

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city live for us, which is a thing that very few guides can do. May he live long to enjoy his domain, and may his son, and his son's son, and his son's son's son be worthy descendants of the fertile Saint!

Let me close this chapter with a page from modern India. In the hotel we met an American girl who told us of an unfortunate experience with a guide in one of the Rajputana cities, unfortunate only so far as he asked her questions to which there was no answer. He was just a youngster, she said, pleasant to talk to, but very naïve, and incurably anxious to learn the ways of the West, and in particular those of the United States, for which he had the greatest admiration.

"How is it," he asked, "that in America where each man is allowed to chose the wife he wishes most of all, there are so many divorces?"

There was no answer to that. Still less was there one to his second question.

"Are there prisons in America?"

"Oh, yes, of course."

"But what are people put in those prisons for?"

"Well, for robbing and stealing."

"But is it not true that in America the rich people take care of the poor people, and give them money?"

"Yes, we do that."

"Well, if the poor people are given money, why do they rob and steal?"

Which only goes to show that there are other points of view beside our own.

## CHAPTER XVI

*We leave British India for a day, and discover a strange comparison between an Indian State and our own country*

WHEN London is brightened by the arrival of some of the Native Princes of India, come to take part in some Empire ceremony, Londoners are given a very exaggerated picture of the Golden Land of Hindustan. Magnificent uniforms, retinues which take up whole floors of our most expensive hotels, and a profusion of gold and precious stones all go to create an impression of wealth untold and magnificence undreamed of in the humdrum West. Yet this display is nothing more than an illusion. India is a land of poverty, not a land of wealth; the legend that it is the "brightest jewel in the Imperial Crown" arises more from the past glories of the Mogul Emperors and from the lavish displays on the occasion of a Royal Durbar than from the sober facts of present day conditions.

Whence, then, come these magnificent potentates? They come, not from British India, but from the Native States, districts which lie outside the domination of the Government of India, and which can best be described as independent States, tied to Great Britain by treaty and concession.

Look at the political map of India and you will see that while the greater part of it is coloured red, there are

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patches of varying size coloured yellow, which, taken together, make up about one third of the whole. These are the Native States. Each one is governed by its own Maharaja, who rules according to his own conception of right and justice, though his right to misgovern in a flagrant manner is limited by treaty with Great Britain. Each, by way of recognition of his sovereignty, is entitled to a Royal Salute of a number of guns varying according to the extent of his territory and the terms of his treaty with the real sovereign power.

The Native State is, therefore, different from British India in so far as the greater part of the governing power lies in the hands of the Maharaja. He may grant his people a Constitution, and thus delegate a part of that power, and he will largely defer to the wishes of the Government of India, but the fact remains that he occupies the position of supreme ruler, and, in virtue of that, keeps himself in the state expected of an Oriental despot. Statistics for the Native States are hard to come by, for many of them do not even publish any figures, but from estimates which have been made from such figures as have been published it appears that to maintain a Prince in a state suitable to his position costs anything from fifteen to twenty five per cent of the State revenue, a percentage which seems immense to us, but which the Indian Princes no doubt consider extremely conservative. It is from the proceeds of such expenditure that London is occasionally treated to displays of Oriental splendour, and so they should not be taken as in any way symptomatic of conditions in India as a whole.

This is by way of introduction to the next stage of our journey, for, after leaving Agta, we paid a short visit to



the Native State of Gwalior which lies only a little way to the south. It lies on the eastern fringe of Rajputana, and has a history which goes back further than that of Northern Europe. Invasion after invasion has swept over it, and yet it still remains independent but for its thralldom to Great Britain and rich in a tradition of fighting spirit and national culture.

As our train drew near we could see the old Fort standing high against the skyline. It is built on an immense rock which rises sheer out of the plains and commands the countryside in every direction. Three hundred feet high, nearly two miles long, and varying in width from a quarter of a mile to less than two hundred yards, it is an extraordinary sight, for its rocky walls fall perpendicularly to the plains, and there is not even the vestige of a hill in the vicinity with which to compare it. Elsewhere throughout Rajputana there are other such rocks, and their ideal adaptability for defensive purposes no doubt explains why so many strong Native States have arisen through that district; but they are all widely separated, so that each appears like a solitary geological extravagance, springing with neither rhyme nor reason from the illimitable plains.

We sent Mahmoud in search of a reasonably clean *tonga*, and were soon jogging along over the uneven roads towards the Fort. At the gateway the *tonga* came to a stop, and, after being duly inspected by the Indian soldier on guard, and having paid our entrance fee, we were allowed to proceed on foot. According to the guide-book, "distinguished visitors and State guests" are provided with an elephant on which to make the ascent, but, unhappily, we belonged to neither of these categories,

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and as nothing so humble as a tonga was allowed inside we had to do as best we could on our own feet. Though what passes for India's "cold weather" was supposed to be upon us it was only after a fearful struggle that we succeeded in reaching the top. The sun had not yet retreated behind the rock, and the road, which shelved up at an impossible angle, was covered with a thin layer of gravel on which we tended to slip back two paces for every one we took forward. We began to feel a sympathy for the invading armies of the past, and to understand how it was that Gwalior Fort had earned its reputation for long sieges. That it did fall from time to time seems almost unbelievable, but fall it did—to the Moguls amongst others—though how any army could carry its assault up that ascent with the defenders perched securely on the heights above is a mystery to me.

Once arrived at the top, we sat down on a low stone wall to rest and survey the view. We could see the road twisting down the face of the rock, passing through one or two carved archways on its route, and then, far away beneath us, the rude huts and tumble-down buildings of old Gwalior clustered round the gate through which we had entered. In every direction the plains stretched out in a long monotonous flatness across which we could see the railway running in a dead straight line. Here and there were small villages, insignificant islands on the broad sea of brown, arid countryside. Far away to the east a hazy blue line on the horizon marked a distant line of hills.

When we had recovered sufficiently we turned in at the Fort gate, and made our way round to where the old Palace stood. It has been deserted for many years now,

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and remains only as a rather lovely relic of an ancient civilization; for the present Maharaja belongs to the moderns, and lives in a new Palace built by his father amidst all the luxuries of running water and the best British-made lavatory-pans. Under the peace of the British Raj the Fort has outlived its use, and, though it is still garrisoned by the Maharaja's troops it is more for sentimental reasons than for any potential necessity.

We were met by a guide who might have been whisked by a magician's wand directly from ancient India. He was a venerable old man with a white beard and the deep, serious eyes of a High Priest. Wound round his head he wore a massive white turban decorated with black spots. He salaamed, and gestured to us to enter, and then, taking the lead, conducted us round the inner courts and rooms. He had no English, which was a pity, for he could only point without being able to explain, but he was very necessary all the same, for we would certainly have lost ourselves in the maze of passages if he had not been there to show us the correct way.

But I am doing him an injustice in saying that he had no English at all. He had been taught three words which he had learned to use to great effect. As he led us through a low doorway he turned and said in a deep, resounding voice, "Mind your head". He did that every time we came to a place where the roof was low, and the passages and courts echoed and re-echoed his booming tones—"Mind your head. Mind your head," each word deeply intoned in half time, the last being carried over for an additional semi-quaver. Unfortunately on the first occasion he said it I was far too astonished to take his good advice, and bumped my head severely on the sharp

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stone, but thereafter I listened to him with respect, and bowed my head obediently to his command.

The Palace was a delightful spot. After Benares I had come to the unfair conclusion that all Hindu architecture was revolting—but I had forgotten about the Rajputs. They were a fighting race, strong of body with minds less tainted by the squalid Hinduism of the Ganges valley than those of the ordinary Indians, and this showed itself in the relative purity of their arts. Possibly it was because the Palace had been deserted for so long, and was, therefore, comparatively clean, that we were so taken by it—I can well imagine that our reactions would have been very different if the floors had been covered with betel juice, and all the corners filled with decaying rubbish—but even then I do not think that we could have failed to have been attracted by its exquisite carvings and its quaint little courtyards.

The rooms were all small, and were less rooms as we know them than covered in courtyards opening through archways into a central open courtyard. They had nothing in common with the open grandeur of the Mogul Palaces, and yet they seemed to be neither cramped nor squat. The carvings which decorated the pillars of the arches and the walls of the open courtyards had been executed so finely and in such durable stone that even their five hundred years of age had failed to spoil them. Here and there they had been restored, but in most places they were original, and spoke well of the craftsmanship which had first conceived and executed them.

The Throne Hall, the Sleeping Apartment, the Women's Quarters, all empty and deserted, and yet all freshly redolent of the life they once had seen. For some

reason it was more difficult to reconstruct these ancient days than it had been amongst the ruins of Fatehpur Sikri, and though I could sense the atmosphere of pageantry and pomp which once had filled them, I could not picture it in detail, could not see it all again, nor hear the weird Indian music swelling up in its midst. It would have been rich in colour, rich in sound and movement, and finely clad slaves and slave-girls would have moved silently to and fro amongst the arches. But none of that remains to-day—only the faint scent of a forgotten life rising out of the past which serves in some measure to quicken the dead and annihilate the distances of time.

Back in our tonga once again we drove through what is left of Old Gwalior towards the modern town. In the far-off days when war in India was sudden and without mercy the town had clustered round the foot of the Fort, so that a safe refuge might be easily at hand; just as in feudal times in Europe the Castle had served as a centre for the nearby population. In recent years, however, there has been no need for such precautions, and a new city has grown up some distance from the old. Now that the Maharaja no longer lives in the Fort, but in a new modern Palace, the elite of Gwalior have followed him.

That is not to say, however, that Old Gwalior has been deserted. We found it still teeming with life, its streets crowded, and its tumbledown buildings mostly occupied. Few of the buildings remained standing in their entirety, and frequently their places had been taken by rough hovels which crowded together in the evil-smelling streets. Those which had become too tumbledown to

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suit even the poorest of the people had been left to rot away, which made the whole place look as though it had just suffered from a very up to-date bombardment. Of the larger old buildings a few remained, great cracks disfiguring their walls and their upper stories tumbling in ruins though their lower stories were still occupied.

And the people! My God, the people! Calcutta and Benares had been revolting for their squalor and their filth, but they were wealthy centres compared to what we saw in Old Gwalior. Everyone was in rags, everyone seemed to be covered with sores, bodies were wasted, and there were beggars enough to stock the whole of the East. There was not a cheerful face to be seen, only dull, lifeless expressions from which dire poverty had robbed every vestige of human happiness. Outside the houses sat women in dirty, oily saris, some nursing babies at their skinny, dried up breasts, some staring hopelessly in front of them, too languid even to look up as we passed. The men too seemed to have been robbed of their manhood, and the grotesque caste marks which covered their foreheads showed that poverty and Hinduism make good bedfellows. It was a dreadful place, and we were thankful when we slipped beyond it out into the open road.

The road ran along the foot of the Fort in a southerly direction, and the great sandstone cliffs towered above us, the buildings on the top seeming almost to overhang, and be on the point of tumbling down on our heads. By this time the sun was sinking towards the West, and the cliffs protected us from its glare. On our left we could see the outline of the Fort cut in dark shadow on the flat earth.

Some two miles from Old Gwalior we came to the

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outskirts of Lashkar, the new city, and drove through gardens, rich in greenery and luscious flower-beds, towards the Maharaja's Palace. At the gateway to its grounds a sentry stopped us, but we were able to look down the avenue to the white marble bulk of the Palace in the distance. It was a massive, grandiose building which would have put Buckingham Palace in the shade, and we could see sentries parading up and down before the main doorway. It seemed clean too, which was surprising, and was, on the whole, far more of a western building than an eastern one. It belonged to the Europe of several centuries ago when Kings were still Kings and neither constitutional monarchs nor dictators' puppets, brought up to date in everything but social custom.

The main part of the town lay not far away, and we drove through the Sarafa, or Street of the Merchants, which is highly extolled in all guide-books as being the supreme example of the modernized India. It was indeed a modernized bazaar with a broad street running between the shops instead of the usual narrow lane. It was crowded with people and sacred cows, and, unlike the bazaars in other cities, its shops were all fairly substantial buildings, and looked as though they belonged to wealthy people. The upper rooms were all provided with balconies decorated with plaster screenwork of wonderfully intricate designs.

The street, too, was rich in colour. We were on the fringe of Rajputana, where, above all other districts in India, colour is the predominating feature of the scene. Elsewhere the people wore clothes of white, or dirty white, but the land of the Rajputs is gay with scarlets, yellows, mauves and blues. The women seemed to favour

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Jodhpur trousers—not the neat, tailored garments which make a weekly appearance in Rotten Row, but the genuine article cut from brightly coloured silk, from which our riding breeches have been derived. They are long, loose trousers, the lower parts of which are wrapped tightly round the calves and ankles, thus giving approximately the same impression as that so laboriously acquired by our tailors. In addition the women all wore saris of a different colour, scarlet to go with yellow trousers, or a rich purple to go with royal blue trousers, thus turning the street into a vivid kaleidoscope of intermingling hues.

They were, moreover, more beautiful than the usual run of Indian women, their features more regular, and their figures more athletic and attractive. They did not stoop, but walked erect and swingingly like the women of Java.

Nor were their menfolk behindhand in their colouring. They wore jackets that would have turned little Jacob green with envy, and their turbans, instead of being a plain white, were blue, or red, or yellow. They wore the flat turban which is not often seen in other parts of India. A few folds of cloth are wound round the head, and then the remainder is twisted into a rope, and bound round the head so as to make it look like a solid brim. Turbans of this kind are always worn at a jaunty angle over on one side of the head, which gives the wearer an unusually jovial appearance which even a scowling countenance cannot altogether deny.

At the far end of the Sarafa we came to the Phul Bagh, a small square in the centre of which there was a garden and a bandstand. It was a Sunday, and a military band concert (of European music) was in progress, just as



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though it was a Sunday afternoon in Hyde Park. It is curious to note how eagerly India has taken to the European conception of Sunday as a day of rest. Hinduism specifies no particular weekly holiday, and though not all the districts observe Sunday in quite such a western manner as Gwalior, it is noticeably less active than any of the week-days.

A large crowd, made up of every class and caste thronged the square. Coolies rubbed shoulders with men who, from their fine clothing, appeared to be wealthy merchants. The only people who were thoroughly exclusive were a few Muslim women in purdah who were heavily hooded, and gazed out at the world through small gauze-covered eye-holes in their thick draperies.

There was a fair salting of holy men in the crowd. We had seen many of them in Benares, sitting at the roadside deeply immersed in their own mysteries, but here they were very much alive, striding in and out amongst the people, beating on small drums and wailing out quotations from the sacred books in high-pitched voices which did their best to drown the band's music. They were naked, but for the scantiest of loin-cloths, and their unkempt hair fell in knotted ropes over their faces and shoulders. Some had smeared themselves with ashes, and were streaked a dirty white. They were picturesque, but scarcely pleasant to look upon. Nora thought that they must be mad, and they certainly had every appearance of being so. And yet, I doubt it. Professional holiness is a very paying proposition in India, and its discomforts are probably not as great as they seem to be.

As we drove back to the hotel the sun was setting.

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There were a few clouds near the horizon, and the sky behind the fort was a vivid blaze of orange and scarlet. I shall always remember Gwalior by that last glimpse of it, the great mass of the fort standing out against the burning sky, its rugged rocks, its battlemented walls, its turreted buildings all outlined in black silhouette. The cool of the evening was upon us, and there was perfect peace in the air. It was very, very beautiful.

It is impossible, after so short a visit, to pick on one or two points, and say "These are the characteristics of the Native States." Nevertheless, there are one or two observations I would like to make, not about the States generally, but about Gwalior in particular.

Anyone in India will tell you that Gwalior is amongst the most modern of the States, and that its rulers of the present century have been more enlightened than the average. A view of Lashkar quickly bears this out. It is an Indian city, and its people are Indians, but it has far more in common with one of our towns than, say, Benares or the Indian part of Lucknow. It is a Hindu city over which broods the spirit of the Hindu religion, an Indian city in which Indian dress and Indian customs are the order of the day, an Oriental city largely given over to that Oriental passivity which is so very different from our Occidental activity, but in spite of that it is a city which is fundamentally based on western ideas.

After all, when we talk of the Maharaja of Gwalior being an enlightened ruler we merely mean that he is conforming to our own ideas of what is best. We have not yet reached a position from which we can regard the abstraction, enlightenment, with dispassionate eyes. We

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mean that he is conforming to western practice in his Government. Ours not to reason whether this be good or bad.

The contrast between Lashkar and Old Gwalior is startling and unpleasant, but it is not altogether to be wondered at. When Dickens was writing about London he could provide contrasts enough, and if he were alive to-day he still could in many instances. We have abolished the worst forms of poverty, and do what we can to smooth over the most glaring inequalities, but only the most prejudiced observers could maintain that we have nothing in common with such a State as Gwalior.

Let us look at it in more detail. Until a short time ago Gwalior was ruled by an Oriental despot who concentrated all power into his own hands, and used that power for the furtherance of his own magnificence, championing the commonweal only in so far as it helped to maintain or enlarge the State's boundaries. The same might be said of England at a more remote period. The Tudors and early Stuarts were autocrats, ruled by Divine Right, and considered their own welfare the welfare of the State. Then came "enlightenment"—a slow process occupying several centuries, in the course of which the *bourgeoisie* crept into power, and replaced the Government of the King with a Government of the merchants and manufacturers.

In Gwalior the same process has been achieved more quickly. Europe provided models on which enlightenment could be based, and the Government of India was not behindhand in giving assistance. The ruler's hand was forced, and what had been Government for the Maharaja became Government for the merchants, with

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the Maharaja still maintaining the outward appearance of his old power. The new city of Lashkar is the embodiment of this new development. The Sarafa is merely Piccadilly in a new guise. The Phul Bagh is Hyde Park. Old Gwalior is the East End, or a depressed area—have it as you will. The Fort is a relic of ancient sovereignty, rather like the Tower of London.

Deep down below the customs, habits and beliefs which go to make the distinctions between East and West there is a quality common both to Asia and Europe, a quality which is unchangeable, and, in our present state of civilization, ineradicable. Some would call it human nature, others the love of power, still others the love of money. Whatever it may be it is the most compelling of all the forces which combine in the building and destruction of civilizations, and, however far separated may be the areas in which it works, its products will be fundamentally the same.

East is East, and West is West, but human nature is human nature, and whether we wear loin cloths or trousers, whether we worship Christ or Siva or Ganesh, whether we eat with our fingers or with knives or forks, whether we live by machines or by human muscles, we still march along the same paths towards the same endings.

The lesson of Gwalior is the lesson of universality. A few weeks after we left the new Maharaja was crowned. The richness and pageantry and publicity of the ceremony were second only to those of the Coronation of our own King and Queen a few months later.

## CHAPTER XVII

*We climb into the Himalayas once again to see the  
Government of India at work*

WE did not stay the night at Gwalior. We had thought of doing so, for our guide-book listed a splendid hotel belonging to the Maharaja. According to the printed description it was a palatial place, but we soon found that this did not accord entirely with the facts. As a building it looked superb, being decked out with long shady balconies and cool patios, but when the manager took us to our room we discovered that the floor was literally crawling with huge black ants, each a good half inch long. Another room on a higher floor was exactly the same. A third room was even more densely populated. We sent Mahmoud off to the station to inquire whether there was a good night train to Delhi, and he came back to report that there was one at midnight.

The manager simply could not understand it, and to lighten his distress we told him the old, old story of an important engagement which had been forgotten. To him the ants were of no consequences whatever. They were to be found all over Gwalior, he said, even in the Palace, implying that what was good enough for the Maharaja was good enough for us. Doubtless that was quite reasonable, but it just did not strike us in that way, and so we fled on the midnight train, having packed as

much sightseeing into the afternoon as the time and the heat would allow

We had intended to stay in Delhi for some time, and then go on up to Simla, but circumstances made us reverse this part of our itinerary. We had no sooner settled into our hotel than we learned that the Assembly was sitting only for another three days in Simla, and that if we wanted to see the hill station in the full flush of its imperial glory we would have to start off quickly. The gentleman who gave us this information was a full-blooded Nationalist with a hearty contempt for the British Raj and all its ways, but he felt he was doing his duty by the letter of introduction we carried with us by telling us how and where to see the sights. He was amazingly contemptuous of the whole Government machinery, and of the Assembly in particular.

"Personally I take no notice of it at all," he said somewhat patronizingly, "but you as a visitor ought to see it, and hear one of the debates. After all, what is it but a debating society? It has no power but the power of speech. I will have nothing to do with it."

Such is the orthodox Nationalist attitude towards India's elected Parliament. The Viceroy can override Parliamentary decisions if he deems fit, wherefore they consider it a mere formality to debate any measure. That does not stop them from putting up for election, however, nor, if they are elected, from making good use of that power of speech to which our friend referred so slightly. The Indian Hansard is choked with denunciations of the British, denunciations which, though couched in the most bitter invective, slide almost unnoticed over the backs of the British Official Members.

because they know that they are only so much sound and fury. This makes the Assembly one of the most interesting legislative bodies in the world. It is a supreme authority with a still more supreme authority standing over it, playing schoolmaster in a way which makes all good Nationalists see red, and cry to heaven their detestation of British apron-strings. We felt that it would be a shame to miss it just for the sake of standing by the programme we had set ourselves, and so we packed up, and that night took the train for Simla.

We woke next morning to hear the train painfully puffing its way up the steep incline to Kalka, where we were to change into a car. One thing which the Indian Railways, excellent in many respects, seem never yet to have achieved, is the arrangement of a time-table which will prevent passengers being rudely awakened in the middle of the night. Time and again we found ourselves turned out onto platforms in the dull grey light of early morning, and on this occasion it was exactly half-past four when we drew to a halt at Kalka station, and Mahmoud came hurrying along from the servant's compartment to bundle up our bedding.

Poor Mahmoud! He was not feeling at all well this morning. An aching tooth had puffed his face out on one side till he looked like an advertisement for the wrong kind of toothpaste, and this doubtless accounted for the sudden display of temper which he showed a little later in the morning.

We breakfasted in the station buffet, and then went in search of a car. Everyone was travelling down from Simla these days, and few were travelling up. Consequently fares had dropped considerably as all the drivers

were anxious to get to the top where the shortage of cars to bring people down had sent fares skyrocketing up to astonishing heights. The normal fare from Siliguri to Darjeeling was twenty rupees, and so when the ticket collector came to tell me that he could get me a car for eight rupees I jumped at the offer. The luggage was piled on to the back, and we were just on the point of starting out when Mahmoud who had been wandering off in an other direction (nursing his toothache, I thought) came running back, and proceeded to behave in a perfectly inexplicable manner. He began with a broadside of abuse in Hindustani, directed against the driver, which even to my unaccustomed idea sounded as though he was calling up a hidden lore of curse words and genealogical reflections. When the driver took no notice he rushed round to the back of the car and with astounding fury began to untie the ropes and tear the luggage from the grid. We turned round, and yelled at him to stop, but this only seemed to increase his rage, and he paid not the slightest attention to anyone until the driver followed him round and, to our immense astonishment, literally cringed to him. Mahmoud immediately stopped his labours, and in a dignified manner indicated that the luggage might be put back again. This he left to the driver, coming round and seating himself in the front of the car instead of helping him. While the driver puffed and panted with our suit cases Mahmoud leaned over to us, and explained just exactly how the commotion had arisen.

It seemed that no cars were allowed inside the station yard until they had actually been hired. Not far away there were about fifty waiting for passengers, all of them offering to make the journey for the day's standard rate of



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two rupees. Our kindly ticket-collector had merely been exploiting our ignorance, and it was not until Mahmoud had threatened our driver with getting no passenger at all that he had expressed himself willing to come down to the general price.

The journey was a thrilling one. There were no mists such as had engulfed us on our way up to Darjeeling, so that all the way we were treated to a magnificent panorama of mountain scenery. It was still dark when we started, but dawn was on its way, and we could see vaguely the outlines of the hills above us. Suddenly the car swept round a corner, and, like the crack of a pistol, the dawn was on us. It had been hidden by the shoulder of a hill, so that it burst on us just as though someone had turned on an electric light in the sky. I know nothing of Moulmein, where the dawn comes up like thunder, but it could not be any more spectacular there.

Ahead of us lay the top of the ridge we were climbing, but for what seemed ages we continued to twist our way up towards it without coming any nearer. When at last we did reach the summit it was just in time to meet the rising sun which lit up the sea of peaks ahead of us like a great searchlight from the wings of a gigantic stage. From this point the road turned downwards and twisted its way round a thousand agonizing curves till we had reached the valley floor on the other side of the ridge. In a tiny village there we stopped for a cup of tea, not because we wanted it, but because our driver refused to move for another half-hour. It is a local law that no car may take less than three and a half hours to cover the distance between Kalka and Simla, enacted no doubt with the purpose of keeping down speed on what is certainly a very

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dangerous road. If that is the purpose of the law, however, it has scarcely been achieved, for our driver waited at the half way house just long enough for him to be able to complete the rest of the journey at a speed that made us hang on to each other and pray for a safe landing.

The last ten miles were the most spectacular. We could see Simla far ahead of us straddling a ridge connected by a narrow neck with the ridge on which we were driving. Below us the valley seemed to reach almost out of sight, while on the far side the green hills rose high above us, their summits etched cleanly against the flawless blue of the sky beyond.

Having settled into the hotel, I collected the letters of introduction I had picked up on the way, and set off on what Nora called my "big game hunt." I was anxious to meet a number of the leading Indian politicians, and hear from their own lips just how the whole problem of India was to be settled. After considerable hunting, waiting, chasing and ambushing, all of which occupied the several days until the end of the session, I succeeded in my task, and was able to come away with a diary bulging with so many conflicting opinions that what had seemed a fairly straightforward question of independence or no independence had assumed the complexity of a major cosmic crisis.

The contents of that diary and the results of the studies which preceded and followed our stay in Simla belong to another book, but I saw and heard enough while we were there to add considerably to this one. Within a short time I succeeded in obtaining a ticket for the Visitor's Gallery in the Assembly. It was given me by a well known Congress Member, who, though educated in

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England, had returned almost completely to an Indian mode of life. He was dressed in coarse *khadder*, the home-spun cotton which is the trademark of every true Nationalist and has become the symbol of Indian independence, and on his head he wore a small "Ghandi" cap, which is rather like an Air Force forage cap in shape. He took me to the Assembly office, where the numerous declarations necessary to get me a pass were duly signed.

"There are so many formalities to be gone through," he apologized. "They are very frightened of getting a bomb in the middle of the Assembly."

This last sentence was spoken in a tone of uttermost contempt, but as an afterthought he added much more cheerfully:

"Some day they *will* get one."

I attended the Assembly next day. It was an instructive morning. The unreality of the proceedings was equalled only by the deadly seriousness with which the Opposition Members flung out their shafts against the Government. There was no opening prayer, which is really not at all surprising, for it would have been beyond the wit of mortal man to devise a form of prayer acceptable to the medley of Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Parsees and Untouchables who made up the total of Representatives.

Question hour began immediately after the Clerk had opened the proceedings, and was carried on laboriously as each question produced its crop of supplementaries. No sooner was an answer given than at least a dozen Opposition Members sprang to their feet demanding further inquiries. The President was hard put to it to preserve order. Each time he decreed that there should

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be no further supplementaries a groan of indignation surged through the Opposition benches, and usually one or two recalcitrants would remain on their feet demanding to be heard. However, had he allowed the business to be protracted for as long as they wished it is doubtful if more than half a dozen questions could have been dealt with.

As it was some fifty questions were answered. Almost without exception they were designed to illustrate the depravity of the British, and they ranged from inquiries as to the disposal of the contracts to paint the carriages on the State owned railways to the bitter question of the finance of the Christian Churches.

In Great Britain Parliamentary questions are designed to inform the electorate on certain matters, so that it may have some data on which to make a decision during elections. Here, however, it was different. The questions still made matters public, but the electorate is given no opportunity of dethroning the real ruling power in the country. Questions are, therefore, not of the same vital importance to the Government. It does not matter if the Official Members do not give satisfactory answers, as there is no real practical check on their actions. The Official Members are well aware of this, and many of their answers to questions are casual and indefinite. They would never dare to answer in the same manner if they occupied corresponding positions in the House of Commons. Sometimes they are openly contemptuous, showing clearly that they think this questioning is a pure waste of time.

The Opposition knows this just as well as the Government, but it keeps up its string of questions as though in

desperation. Some are patently ridiculous, such as, "Will Government explain how sums budgeted as 'secret expenditure' are spent?" This was answered by an Official with the single word, "Secret", which produced a bumper crop of supplementaries.

When question hour was over the Assembly passed on to legislative business. A European Official Member introduced a Bill to make an additional tax on the tea companies to provide funds for foreign advertising (which probably meant judicious lobbying against tea taxes). He read a speech which sounded as though it had been prepared by other hands. I have rarely seen such a pompous little man; he was the ideal of the pukka Indian Official. He radiated self-conceit from every pore, and was just stout enough to look like a cartoon of a millionaire. The Bill was not contested, and an Indian Member rose to say so on behalf of the Opposition in a witty little speech. Both Government and Opposition giggled at his sallies, and the animosities of question time seemed to have been forgotten. Government was not to be allowed to get off too lightly, however. Indian politics are really very complicated. There was one dissident on the Opposition side who dissented for personal reasons which he proceeded to enumerate at great length. He wore a *dhobi* with the addition of a white robe flung round his body. A magnificent white beard which reached almost to his waist made him look like an Old Testament prophet, an illusion which was heightened by his voice, which rolled out in long, resounding periods.

He was not a tea-drinker, he explained, and he considered that tea-drinking was grossly immoral. He objected violently to the idea of spending money on propa-

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ganda for the drinking of tea. It was fostering immorality, the taking of drugs. Some people tried to prove that tea was good for one by showing that germs and bacteria could not live in it. But germs and bacteria can not live in quinine or in arsenic, both of which are sometimes taken as medicine. Let them treat tea as a medicine if they wished, but let them not, he begged, foster this wicked cult of tea-drinking for pleasure.

It takes a short time to write down the gist of his remarks, but he was by no means brief in speaking. His voice rumbled on and on while the rest of the Assembly yawned, until at last the President rose to announce that it was time for the House to adjourn for lunch. The prophet begged for another five minutes, but the President was adamant, and the Assembly broke up amidst much laughter, most of the Government Members returning to the Cecil Hotel for one of the big lunch parties which mark the end of every session.

Next day I visited the Upper House, the Legislative Council, which holds its meetings in the Viceregal Lodge. I was taken there in company with one of the leading Opposition Members, who was living in our hotel. We went there in rickshaws, vehicles which bear only a slight resemblance to the rickshaws one sees in most Eastern cities. They are comfortable chairs mounted on four wheels, and are propelled by four coolies, two in the front and two behind. The hills make this number absolutely necessary, and even the four of them have a difficult time in pulling their passengers up some of the roads.

Our progress was in the nature of a triumphal march. Recognizing that we were bound for the Viceregal

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Lodge coolies salaamed as we went by, and as we passed through the Lodge gates a platoon of soldiers presented arms. Thereafter the drive was guarded by soldiers every fifty yards, each of whom sprang to the salute as we rolled by. I began to feel that I was no end of a fellow. The Council was a much more dignified body than the Assembly. There were only one or two questions, after which they plunged straight into legislative business, which, being the discussion of a Companies Bill, was extremely dull. Instead of listening, I spent my time watching the Members. It was rather like having a dream of the "When Knights Were Bold" type in which all the characters are people one knows, for I had seen nearly all those present at the hotel. It was amusing to pick them out. I had never suspected how much I had been rubbing shoulders with the elect. I recognized most of the European Members and nearly all of the Indians as well. One old man, whom I had noticed especially at the hotel, partly on account of his round bald head and his Punch-like features, and partly on account of his manner of aping European habits (he used to wander round the dining-room each night, puffing at an expensive cigar and exchanging small-talk at the various tables he visited) appeared in the character of President.

Everyone, unlike in the Assembly, was in European dress, and looking very opulent with their heavy watch-chains, except one solitary Muslim in Mohammedan costume, who struck the only discordant note in the proceedings by saying that he would very much like to move some amendments, but he knew very well that Government would not accept them. Altogether his

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speech was very badly received as he offended the pleasant assumption of the Council that there was no real Opposition by blackguarding the British in every possible way. He was called to order for irrelevancy several times by Mr. Punch, the President, who grew angrier and angrier every moment until I thought that an explosion was imminent.

After that traditional protest against the British Raj the proceedings settled down to a dull equanimity, and I left shortly afterwards. My solitary course back to the hotel was just as triumphant as the outward journey, and at the Lodge gates I was treated to a "Present Arms" all to myself.

The general impression left by these two brief glimpses into India's Governmental machinery was that the best was being made of a bad job. It was so obviously a toy Parliament that neither side was able to take it quite seriously. But while this bored the Government it drove the Indians to a high pitch of fury. It seems a pity that good men should have to waste so much time in fulfilling a formality, and yet it is difficult to see any other way by which India may finally achieve full self government. Democratic institutions cannot spring up overnight. That is a platitude, but the real point about platitudes is that they are true.

Simla is not just the Upper and Lower Houses of the Indian Parliament. It is the summer seat of the Civil Service as well, and is the very pith and essence of the officialdom that lies at the root of all European society in the East.

Punctually at the end of April every year the Govern



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ment of India uproots itself from its magnificent quarters in New Delhi, and retires *en masse* to the hills. Everyone goes. The Viceroy goes, the Officials go, the Assembly goes, the Council goes, all the wives go with their men-folk, all the hangers-on and lobbyists, who are legion, go, and so do people from all over India who wish to be in the social swim for the year. New Delhi is deserted except for such few Officials, mostly Indians, as have to remain to keep it from falling down. It becomes like Fatehpur Sikri, filled with empty halls, and presenting such an air of complete solitude that the visitor is tempted to think that here is another civilization gone the way of Nineveh and Tyre.

But Simla springs into a new life after a winter's hibernation during which it lies deserted, deep in the snows and in its own solitude. In summer it makes up for its loneliness by springing into a glory which the Himalayas have never seen throughout their thousands of years of history. It is not a particularly beautiful spot—in comparison to Darjeeling it is very ordinary—and I doubt if many people would go there of their own accord. But it is convenient for Government, and Government transforms it from a very ordinary hill station into the social centre of the great Empire of India. Every hotel is filled to overflowing, every boarding-house is packed, and every villa has its full quota of inhabitants.

Before I describe social Simla let me say a few words about official Simla. It is just like an immense Government building, a huge Somerset House perched away up on the inaccessible Himalayas. At every corner signposts point the way to this or that Department of State, and the streets are filled with Government *chaprassies* (mes-

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sengers), resplendent in scarlet uniforms and gold braid, hurrying on their ways with arms full of official documents. Everyone seems to be O H M S. There is an immense bustle everywhere, and the stranger feels that something tremendously important is toward

Senior Officials are whirled down the Mall in rickshaws pulled by four coolies dressed in the special livery of their master. They sit in them with expressions of extreme gravity, as though the whole weight of the Indian Empire rested on their shoulders. I suppose that, to a certain extent, it does—their responsibilities are heavy. But responsibility does not necessarily engender pomposity, and these Officials all seem dreadfully pompous. I suppose that the rickshaws contribute their quota to this frame of mind, to be pushed and pulled by four human beings, who eye you in simple wonder, who are at your beck and call as much as slaves, and who are willing to transform themselves into your beasts of burden in return for the pittance you pay them, naturally leads you to prize yourself more highly than such cattle, and to survey the world through which they whirl you as of infinitely less importance than yourself. Add to that the fawning of hangers-on who are anxious to get in your good graces, and who are honoured beyond measure (or pretend to be) if you condescend to raise your hat to them, add also the habit of every poor Indian to salute you as you pass, and cry, "Salaam", and add, last of all, the fact that you yourself come from a country where these amazing marks of respect are not paid even to those who occupy the same position as yourself, and it becomes quite easy to understand why it is that the European *Official tends to place himself on a higher sphere than the*

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ordinary mortal with whom he occasionally comes in contact.

Pomposity, self-assurance and immense conceit are all common form in Simla; not only among the Europeans, but among the Indians as well. The days when the Indian Government was an autocracy of minor officials has not yet entirely disappeared, which is a great pity; for when each petty Official is raised to the status of an Emperor confusion of aims and ideals is bound to set in. Personal snobbery and personal self-esteem block the road to efficient administration, and divorce the Official from the people, whom he can govern well only if he remains in close contact with them. He can enforce law and order, put a stop to crime and prevent flagrant abuses of power; but good government consists of more than that. It raises the people to a higher standard of subsistence, helps them to get more of the real pith of life during their short span on earth, and replaces ignorance and superstition with knowledge and understanding. But to do that a Government must understand its people, be almost a part of them; and yet, from what we saw in Simla, the Indian Government lives on a pinnacle high above the Indian masses. It can never hope to call itself a part of India until the whole basis of its structure has been changed.

It is changing slowly, but wisely. Let us hope that the new reforms will bear good fruit.

If official Simla is divorced from reality, social Simla is only too horribly real. All Indian society is hidebound and rigid, but in Simla it is cast-iron. To begin with everyone knows everyone else. They all come from Delhi, where they have their own social sets, their own

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jealousies and rivalries and their own gossip circles, and when they get up to the hills they re organize their affairs so that life can go on in its old sweet groove. Unfortunately Simla is far more congested than Delhi. There are few private houses, and most people live shoulder to shoulder in hotels. Rivalries turn into blood feuds, and the irritations of perpetual contact lead to problems almost as serious as the communalism of the Muslims and the Hindus.

The Simla of Kipling's day has faded, only to be succeeded by something even more extraordinary. Towards the end of the last century Indians, no matter what their birth, still lay without the recognized social sphere. To day that has changed. Whitehall has adopted a policy of *rapprochement* that presses hardly on the unfortunate Empire builders on the spot. The Council is an innovation, the Assembly is a positively unheard-of departure. The placing of Indians in important official positions has thrown every social standard out of gear. One can be rather maliciously amused by watching the conflicting currents at work—the European hostesses being nice to Indians who are senior to their husbands, the sly remarks they pass about the same when two or three white people are gathered together, the pathetic attempts of Indians to get rid of the inferiority complex that the Europeans do their best to foster, their manner of aping European customs and behaviour. I am convinced that, for an Indian, the first step to office is a pair of trousers and a pipe.

We were astonished at the immense lunch parties and dinner parties which were being given in the hotel each day. Entertainment was most lavish, and often we would

see twenty or thirty people sit down together at a meal. We thought that the Government must provide its employees with money to burn, until we learned just how such hospitality is engineered. We soon noticed that these parties usually seemed to be made up of the same people, with different hosts at different times. They were nearly all living in the hotel. The procedure, we learned later, is this: when anyone wishes to entertain some important personage, say the Viceroy's secretary, he invites a number of the people living in the hotel to lunch at his table. When the guest of honour arrives he finds himself at a banquet, although in actual fact his host is paying for only one or two meals and for the drinks. The other guests pay for their own lunch in their weekly bills. It is just one big sham. Nevertheless, being of an economical turn of mind myself, I feel inclined to applaud the practice.

## CHAPTER XVIII

*We survey the Imperial City, where we find both the grandeur of the Mogul Empire and also the attempt of the present-day rulers to better it. We also prove to ourselves that we have mastered the gentle art of bargaining*

THE Fort at Delhi is the supreme effort of Mogul grandeur. We visited it more than once—four or five times in all—and even then we had not had enough of it. It is impossible to do it full justice on paper, but I want to try and give you some idea of its beauty and magnificence because it expresses so vividly the supreme majesty of the surroundings of the Great Moguls.

It contains nothing so beautiful as the Pearl Mosque at Agra, and it lacks the magic atmosphere of Fatehpur Sikri, but it does more than any other collection of ancient buildings in India to dispel any preconceived illusions the visitor may have had about the “barbaric splendour” of the Mogul dynasty. It shows that they were not barbarians by any means, but that the men who designed these buildings and the men who lived in them were blessed with delicate perceptions and a singularly civilized imagination.

In general lay-out it is similar to other Mogul Forts and Palaces. It has its Halls of Public and Private Audience, its gardens, its Mosques, its baths, all gathered together in much the same manner. This leads many people to

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decry Mogul architecture. It never advanced, they say; it remained fundamentally the same. Improvements were made here and there, but throughout the whole of the Mogul dynasty forms and conventions remained similar. That is true enough in one way. Mogul architecture was certainly hidebound by convention. But within the bounds of that convention it was always improving until the dynasty lost its power and set out on its decline. The Taj Mahal can be recognized in other buildings, but it itself is the perfection of these other buildings. It is the same with the Delhi Fort. It has grown out of other Forts, and represents the pinnacle of achievement in that particular form of architecture.

You enter through a small postern which opens into a tiny courtyard within the outer wall. Facing you the main gateway rises a good hundred feet in the air, its gigantic archway surmounted by strong battlemented defences. You pass through this, and then find yourself in a long, vaulted passage where modern vandalism has permitted dealers in curios and antiques to set up stalls. If you can evade the grasping hands of the dealers ("No must buy, sahib. Just come look round shop.") you come out at the far end into a broad courtyard which in modern times has been transformed into a very pleasant formal garden. On the far side there is yet another gateway which is the entrance to the Palace. It was here that all visitors to the Palace had to dismount from their horses unless they happened to be of blood royal.

These Forts were not just military objects. They acted as the administrative centres of the Empire, and were more like small towns, walled in and battlemented so that they could withstand a siege should the necessity ever

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tion high up on one of the arches shows how this building was appreciated. The translation runs

‘ Be there a Paradise here on earth,  
It is here It is here It is here ’

Just to the south of the Diwan i Khas, surmounting a bastion which sticks some way out from the main wall of the Fort, there is a tiny pavilion known as the Octagon Tower, which, as its name implies, is eight sided. It is covered with a canopy supported on eight slender pillars, each of which is inlaid with topaz, jet, cornelian and other semi precious stones. To this the Emperor would come once in each day to perform the important rite of showing himself to his people who clustered on the plain below.

Beyond this tower lies the Rang Mahal, the Painted Palace, so called on account of the roof and walls having been painted with various designs. It was used as the women's quarters, and through it runs the stream which passes in front of the Diwan i Khas. In the centre there is an intricately carved marble screen, surpassed only by the screen in the Taj Mahal, and on the far side of this there is a shallow fountain. It is about fifteen feet square, and its marble floor is carved to represent the stems and blossoms of lotus flowers. In the old days these carvings were coloured, so that, when the pool was filled, and the fountain playing, the rippling water made it seem as though real flowers were waving beneath it.

It was some time before we became fully acquainted with the stream which meandered through the Palace. After one or two visits we discovered that its source lay at the far end of the Palace gardens, and that it was really



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only a part of a large network of waterways which ran hither and thither throughout the whole of the Palace grounds. The gardens are large, and are somewhat like those surrounding the Taj, being planted with cypress trees and picked out with small marble pavilions. One of these pavilions at the far end of the domain is the source of the Stream of Paradise, as it is called.

Inside it there is a large tank which was probably kept full by a waterwheel or slave labour. From it the water ran out down a marble slope, scalloped so as to make it bubble and splash on its way, into a marble channel. After a short distance the channel breaks in two, one carrying the water to the Palace, the other carrying it through the gardens. There it pursues a vagrant career forming squates and rectangles and tumbling over artificial waterfalls to a lower level. Standing at either end of a sunken terrace are two small marble pavilions through which the water flows. As it comes out it cascades over a marble lip down to the terrace. The wall beneath the lip is set with niches in which it was the custom to burn small lamps at night, thus illuminating the falling water so that it would seem as though light itself was pouring down.

Both in these gardens and in the exquisite buildings of the Palace one feels so much at peace that it is difficult to believe that one is wandering through an empty shell. The whole place is redolent of an unusual charm and artistic sophistication that immediately disarms any unfair preconception of the old India that one may have brought with one. We could not drag ourselves away. Many times during our visit to Delhi we returned there, and in the cool of the evening we would wander by the Stream of Paradise, or sit silently on the broad floor of

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the Diwan i Khas, paying willing tribute to the Great Moguls who had captured Paradise, and brought it down to earth

To turn from the sublime to the ridiculous, it was in Delhi that Mahmoud suddenly gave us startling proof of an unexpected knowledge of the English language. He normally spoke it sufficiently well for us to be able to understand each other, but on this occasion he really surprised us.

In the hotel we had two rooms, a dressing room and a bedroom. Nora had unpacked in the former, and stowed our clothes in a chest of drawers there, but, finding it rather dark, she decided to transfer into the bedroom. There was a chest of drawers in the bedroom of the same size and design, and so, to save trouble, she prepared to switch the drawers across instead of transferring the contents.

"Mahmoud," she cried, "bring me in the two top drawers."

A few moments elapsed, and then Mahmoud came in "These, Mem sahib?"

He was holding a pair of Nora's flimsiest unmentionables!

Great Britain has achieved two great strokes of policy in India. The first came after the Indian Mutiny when the old East India Company was dissolved and Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India. The second was the transfer of the seat of Government from Calcutta to Delhi on the accession of the King Emperor George V.

By the first the Indians were given a ruler more

definite than the shadowy Board of the East India Company, a concrete, living person to whom they could look for leadership and protection in place of the Maharajas to whom they had once owed allegiance. By the second the King-Emperor identified himself with the many ruling dynasties which had preceded his own, for Delhi was the traditional seat of power for those who ruled the Indian Empire.

The transfer of the capital, however, could not be accomplished in a moment. Delhi did not have the necessary accommodation for all the functionaries and officials who trailed in the steps of Government, and there was no alternative but to build another city for them. Sir Edward Lutyens was brought to India for the especial purpose, and given an opportunity such as can fall the way of architects less than once in ten generations. He designed the whole town which sprang from the barren plains in an incredibly short space of time. It stands only a few miles from Old Delhi, and is, perhaps, the most remarkable of all Indian cities.

Town-planning is not an Eastern accomplishment. Streets are allowed to run without rhyme or reason in all directions, and buildings are so congested that even the London slums seem bright and airy in comparison. But New Delhi is as open as a garden city. It is built of white stone, *which shows up cleanly under the bright sun*, and even the meanest dwellings, those of the sweepers, stand on either side of broad thoroughfares. One advantage of India is that there is plenty of space in which the town-planner can spread himself.

The town centres round a broad circle of buildings named Connaught Circle after the Duke of Connaught

who laid the foundation stone on behalf of the King-Emperor. It is some two hundred yards in diameter, and the buildings round it make up the main shopping centre for residents and visitors alike. Radiating out from it in all directions run the residential streets where the houses vary in size from the immense bungalows (one always speaks of a house as a bungalow in India, even though it is a mansion) reserved for the senior officials, down to the small two rooms of the junior Indian clerks.

The official buildings lie some distance away. They are the Viceregal Lodge, the Secretariat and the Assembly. All three are magnificent in appearance, and do their utmost to uphold the dignity of the British Raj, and prove that the architectural field was not the exclusive monopoly of the Great Moguls. Lutyens let himself go on them, with the result that, though quite avoiding the horrible bastard atrocities we saw in Calcutta, he has produced a new architecture which is distinctively Indian, and yet totally devoid of the extravagancies which characterized the Mogul buildings.

The Viceregal Lodge, which one can view only from the distance through its beautiful wrought-iron gates, is far more magnificent than Buckingham Palace. It is a long, low-lying building surmounted by a rather curious shallow dome, and plentifully supplied with pillars. Its formal gardens seem well cared for, and luxuriously appointed.

The two Secretariat buildings stand one on either side of the main road leading up to the Lodge, giving the approach a symmetrical appearance since they are both exactly the same. In perspective they rather dwarf the Lodge, but perhaps that is just a little piece of sym-

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bolic cynicism on the part of Lutyens, for it is said that the Viceroy is little more than a figurehead in comparison to the permanent officials. Coming down from Simla we travelled with an Englishman who was not in the Government Service, and I asked him why it was that the new Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, did not seem to be very popular with the official class.

"Oh, that's easy," he replied. "He's too keen on getting things done, and keeps interfering with them all the time."

These Secretariat buildings are a little more in the Mogul style than the Lodge; reflecting-pools lie before the large domed entrance halls, and inscriptions are inlaid round the tops of the arches. These inscriptions, one of which is in Sanscrit and the other in English, typify the rather priggish nursemaid attitude adopted by the British towards the Indians, just as the inscriptions on the Mogul buildings redound to the greater power and glory of their builders. The English translation reads:

"LIBERTY WILL NOT DESCEND TO A PEOPLE.  
A PEOPLE MUST RAISE ITSELF TO LIBERTY.  
IT IS A BLESSING WHICH MUST BE EARNED  
BEFORE IT CAN BE ENJOYED."

That, I think is India's best example of British tactlessness. It certainly drives most Indians into a mad fury.

The Assembly, which lies behind the Secretariat, is the most European of all, being inclined towards the Greek more than any other school of architecture. It is a circular building, and is built of white marble. The outside is flanked with tall marble pillars. At present it seems

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rather isolated, standing by itself at a considerable distance from any other building, but it is possible that it was thought best to have such a potential storm-centre well removed from its neighbours

Though it was an ingenious stroke of policy to make Delhi the Imperial Capital, one wonders just how far the building of New Delhi has helped to ameliorate Indian discontent. It is said, officially, to have cost £11,000,000, a sum of money which might well have been spent on the improvement of the educational system, or on the promotion of agricultural efficiency. It is all very well to say that the Indian Empire needs an imposing Capital, but the average Indian does not care about that in the least. He wants more food for his stomach and more clothes for his back. Extravagance is the keynote of the Opposition's complaint, and the building of New Delhi is not going to be forgotten by the present generation at any rate.

Moreover, perhaps it is not altogether good policy to emulate, even in a small degree, the Great Moguls. They were great soldiers, lovers of the arts, imposing architects, but they were not good rulers of India. They grabbed what they could, and they spent it on themselves. Many Nationalists make unpleasant comparisons from this point of view.

All the time we had been in the East we had been growing more and more familiar with the gentle art of bargaining. It began in Malaya, where the huxters would come and cluster round the front door of our boarding-house at lunch time every day. All the way up to China

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and back to Bangkok salesmen came on board at every port, and helped us to sharpen our wits against theirs as we harangued each other over prices. Bargaining in the East is the regular method of purchase. The dealer never expects you to pay the first price he asks. If you do he will pocket your money, but he will carry contempt for you in his heart. He enjoys a good tussle as much as anyone else.

By the time we had reached Calcutta we had progressed so much that we had managed to walk out of a shop three times before buying a little tin trunk to carry some of our belongings. But it was at Delhi that we scored our major triumph.

Sometimes, when visiting the Fort, we would loiter round the curio shops in the passageway just inside the main gate. In one we saw an old Tibetan lamp which we knew we simply must possess. But we were crafty. Going inside in a casual manner we priced a number of other things, small finger-bowls, elephant bells and such well-known objects as everyone visiting India brings home in his suit-case. We did not buy anything, however.

When we returned next day the dealer was lying in wait for us, and pounced on us as soon as we had passed through the gate. We went inside his shop and he laid out his wares for us once again. We selected a few, and bargaining began. He wanted twenty-four rupees for the lot, but he said he would be willing to take off ten per cent because we had come to his shop, and not to the one next door belonging to Abdul Hafiz. We said that that was far too much, and were on the point of leaving when Nora's vagrant eye fell casually on the Tibetan lamp. It was quite an interesting little curio she said. Immediately,

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in spite of all our protests and requests that he should not bother himself, he brought it down, and began to expatiate on all its points of excellence, concluding with the amazing news that he was giving it away for nothing at all, just forty rupees which was, all things considered, absolutely ridiculous for anything so priceless.

Nora and I did our best to look disinterested, but we took council together, and while we were doing so the dealer sent his boy round to a nearby soldier's cafe for two cups of tea. These he presented to us along with some evil smelling cigarettes. Now Nora is Irish, and the Irish have very strict ideas about how tea should be made, and this weakly canteen brew appalled her. Moreover, it had already been sugared, which she considered blasphemy. Nevertheless, she put a good face on it, and sipped away gingerly so as to fulfil all the polite requirements of a guest.

Then bargaining began in real earnest. We sat on chairs while the dealer squatted at our feet, fondly fingering the lamp and the other articles we wanted to buy. The total was sixty four rupees. We offered him forty four, half price for the lamp and the full price for the rest. The dealer flung his hands up in horror. Good heavens, no! He could never let them go for such a ridiculous sum. As it was his prices were half those at other shops, and how could he afford to live if he sold his magnificent wares so cheaply? Still, we had been good in coming to his shop, and so we should have the lot for fifty five rupees. He liked us, and he wanted to be generous.

We told him that we appreciated his kindness, but that we could have bought just such a lamp at Darjeeling for only thirteen rupees (which was an utter untruth). How-



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ever, we were prepared to pay a little more because we knew that Delhi was a much longer way from Tibet, and that it must be more expensive here.

Buy such a lamp in Darjeeling! Some insolent dealer had tried to defraud us with a cheap imitation. His was the only one of its kind in all India. Of course there were cheap imitations to be bought everywhere—Birmingham manufactured them in thousands—but his was real, and old. Old! Just let us look at it again, and see how old it was.

We laughed uproariously. The lamp at Darjeeling—and there were plenty of them—was just as old. Why, he would make an excellent profit if he sold it for twenty rupees and flung in all the other things for nothing.

Profit? Profit? He would make no profit. He would incur a heavy loss. His children would be dragged up in poverty. Did we think he would have kept it in his shop for so many years if he could have sold it for twenty rupees, and still made a profit? Just let us look at it again and examine the workmanship. It was worth a hundred rupees at the very least, and he was being a soft-hearted fool to be willing to sell it to us so cheaply. Still, he would make a further sacrifice. He would sell the whole lot for fifty rupees. There now—the whole lot for fifty rupees. I was a wealthy man. Fifty rupees was nothing to me. He was a poor man; he could not afford to sell any cheaper. Did we want him to starve to death?

We agreed that the lamp was lovely. Maybe it *was* worth a hundred rupees, but we could not spend all that money. The fare out to India was heavy. We had not a great deal to spend on luxuries. We could not go above

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forty-four. Very well, then, he would meet us. He would split the difference. Forty-seven rupees. Lower than that he could not go. Higher than forty-four we could not go. It was a deadlock. Well, I would say forty-five, but that must be our last word. We would take the lot for forty-five, or we would not have the lamp at all, and we would give him eighteen rupees for the other things.

Thanking him for the tea and cigarettes we prepared to go. He looked at the lamp. He looked at us. Then, deciding in our favour, he said with an air of finality.

"Very well, sir. I give you them all for forty-five rupees. I wish to please you because you have been very good in coming to my shop."

The lamp hangs in our hall to-day. Friends from India tell us that we have been sadly swindled, and that the dealer has reaped a profit of two hundred per cent at the very least. We do not care. It was worth it to us, even if only because we held out for a full hour, and got the lamp for a smaller price than we had intended to pay in the first place.

## CHAPTER XIX

*We come to the Holy City of the Sikhs, and find a scene  
of modern martyrdom*

WE left Delhi by the night train, for that is the best time to travel in India. In the daytime the heat and the dust turn the compartment into a stifling cell. You can take your choice—sit in the sweltering heat with all the windows closed, or open the windows and cough and choke in the swirling dust.

The platform was crowded with prospective passengers. Most of the platforms of city stations in India are crowded, but on this occasion it seemed as though all Delhi was on the move. As it happened, it was just towards the end of the *Pujas*, or holiday season, and those who had come from all over India to see the great capital were returning home. All the time we had been travelling we had been startled to find that Indian tourists were far more numerous than European tourists. For some reason it had never occurred to us that the Indians would want to see their own country, but they certainly do. I doubt if any other people travel as frequently. We found them everywhere, in Agra, Delhi, Gwalior, Lucknow, whole families of them wandering round like ourselves, guide-book in hand, viewing the glories of their country's past. They came from Bengal and Bombay, from the Punjab and from Rajputana, and they added a touch of

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*the bizarre to our sightseeing, for dress has not changed much in India, and they helped to people the empty buildings with figures from the past.*

They mostly travel either third class or intermediate class, just as few English people travel first class on the English railways, and they have their own peculiar *methods of doing so*. To begin with they never go to the railway station at the right time. They hardly ever make use of a time-table to find out when their train will leave. Instead they just go to the station when they feel that they want to move on, and camp contentedly on the platform until their train comes in, not caring whether it be an hour or half a day

The Delhi platform as we left was thick with little groups squatting in circles round their petrol-lamps or charcoal-burners, cooking and eating their evening meal. It was an extremely colourful sight, for they were all travelling in their best clothes. The men wore magnificent turbans, the women resplendent saris, and the children were dressed to kill in all the finery their parents could afford.

Apart from these little groups there were hundreds of people on foot, all rushing this way and that in a tremendous bustle, some connected with the mails, some with the general administration of the railway, some looking for friends, some searching vainly for a reasonable empty compartment, but by far the greatest number doing nothing in particular but get in the way of everybody else. What noise! What turmoil! One might have thought that Gandhu himself was on the train. But it was just everyday procedure during holiday time.

When we woke early next morning the sun was just

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rising over a new type of scenery. The country was just as flat as it had been all the way from Calcutta, but it was far more evenly cultivated, and the continual succession of irrigation canals served to break it up and relieve its monotony.

Fifty years ago the Punjab was a desert. To-day, thanks to an intricate system of irrigation canals built by British engineers, it has become one of the most fruitful Provinces in all India. The fields are thick with heavy crops, and one need only see some of the patches of uncultivated ground which lie too high for the irrigation water to reach them to understand how much it has meant to this part of India. Such earth is dry and sandy, and looks as though it was barren desert, as, indeed, the whole Province would be without the criss-cross network of irrigation canals which make the plain seem like the strange land which Alice discovered on the other side of the looking-glass.

The Punjab villages were quite different from any others we had seen. They were more like towns—very small towns—for the buildings were all made of brick, and plastered with mud, and seemed far more solid than the flimsy little structures to which we had become accustomed. The Punjab is almost entirely agricultural, and it is said that at least ninety per cent of its people live in these villages. The only two towns of any size are Amritsar and Lahore. Certainly there are a sufficiency of villages. We passed a new one almost every mile, and could see it rising from the plain like a squat, gigantic mud-castle.

Gazing out over the plain I wondered what lay beyond the railway line. On the map India seems to be a network

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of railways, but there are vast areas of hundreds of square miles—thousands of square miles in some cases—which remain unserved either by rail or by road. They are not accessible to the ordinary traveller, and many of their inhabitants can have seen a white man only once or twice in their lives. Politicians, anxious for votes, visit them from time to time, and once in every ten years the census officials will come to enumerate the inhabitants, but even at that their contact with the outside world must be slight. Their remoteness is so great that it is almost impossible to comprehend.

We reached Amritsar at seven o'clock, and after breakfast in the station refreshment room hired a tonga and set out to see something of the town.

Amritsar is the religious capital of the Sikhs, a sect which is best known to us as the powerful fighters who did yeoman service for the Allies during the Great War. They are an offshoot of the Hindus, they might almost be called the Protestants of Hinduism, for their particular cult was originally established in an attempt to wipe out the abuses of that priest-ridden and superstitious religion. In appearance they are perhaps the most magnificent men in India, not excluding even these hardy tribesmen of the far north-west. They have strong, lithe bodies, keen, glittering eyes and handsome features. Their womenfolk are amongst the most beautiful in all India, and their habit of wearing bright, colourful clothes makes a pleasant impression after all the dirt and drabness one meets with elsewhere.

Even the town itself seems to reflect something of its people's manliness. Though it has none of the magnificence of the Mogul cities, it is free from the dank

wretchedness of Benares. The streets are narrow enough in all conscience (in many places people had to flatten themselves against the walls to let our tonga pass, while frequently we had to stop and back to let another vehicle go by) but they are not oppressive and unwholesome. Perhaps this is symbolic of the difference between the religions, for Sikhism, though no longer as pure as when it first appeared, is still free from all the worst superstitions that characterize Hinduism.

But there was plenty of dirt; and there was plenty of poverty. We saw more beggars there than anywhere else in India, and in the poorer quarters the people seemed sunk in a wretchedness which would almost, though not quite, bear comparison with what we had seen in Old Gwalior. Everywhere we went from Calcutta to Peshawar we found the direst poverty. Though we have done much for India on which we can congratulate ourselves, we will not be able to rest on our oars for many a generation to come.

Our first objective was the Golden Temple of the Sikhs, the central shrine of their religion—or rather, the central place of worship, for Sikhism specifically forbids shrines as being idolatrous. After winding our way through the narrow lanes for what seemed an eternity it came as a pleasant surprise, for in conception, if not in execution, it is almost as delightful as one of the Mogul buildings. Our tonga driver pulled up at what seemed to be a large open court, but when we had climbed up the few steps to its level we discovered that it was a large tank a good hundred yards square. The Temple stood on a small marble island built in the exact centre, and it was connected to the town by a marble causeway which

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led from its west door to the west side of the tank

As a building the Temple is rather disappointing, being small and somewhat reminiscent of the least imaginative of Hindu architecture. It gets its name from its domes which are covered with gold leaf, and shine brightly in the sun. By itself it is not particularly beautiful, but the whole scene, the Temple, the tank, the marble causeway, and in the background a tall tower crowned with a golden dome, leaves an imprint on the imagination that cannot easily be erased. Add to that the bright colours worn by the worshippers who stream endlessly back and forth across the causeway, and you will realize that it makes a noble picture, all the more memorable because of the maze of narrow, poverty ridden streets in the midst of which it is set.

We stood watching it for some time. The stream of worshippers never slackened, for it was still the early morning when the chief religious observances of the day take place. Again, as on the waterfront at Benares, I could not help but be amazed at the hold which religion has established over the people of India. We, who attend our churches once a week if we belong to the faithful, but more frequently not at all, cannot conceive the part which religion plays in Indian life. It is the be-all and end all of Indian existence. No one can hope to get to the root of the many problems which modern India affords without first answering the questions, why is it that the supernatural exercises so profound an influence on the Indian people, and how can the energies which are now devoted towards religion be diverted into the building of a better land. The Temple of Mother India which we saw in



Benares is the Nationalist's answer to the second of these questions.

The tower with the golden dome which lies behind the Golden Temple provides one example of how the Indian religions contrive to stifle Indian endeavour. It was built in memory of one of the Sikh Saints, Atal Rai, the son of the sixth *Guru*. The *Gurus* were the religious leaders of the Sikhs, and each appointed his own successor when he died. Altogether there were only ten of them, for the last *Guru*, Govind Singh, refused on his deathbed to name anyone to take his place, saying, with a mysticism common in India, "He who wishes to behold the *Guru*, let him search the *Granth*," which is the Holy Book of the Sikhs.

*Gurus* were credited with all manner of supernatural powers, which sometimes they passed on to their children. This happened in the case of Atal Rai, who once used his power to bring back to life the dead child of a widowed woman. His father reproved him for this act, saying that supernatural powers ought to be displayed only in holy living, and not in working miracles. Atal Rai was so struck by this point of view, and so grieved at having misused his powers, that he immediately repented, saying that, as the gods clearly demanded a life, he would give up his own. Thereupon he lay down and died. The tower which was built in his memory has become one of the most sacred spots of the Sikh religion—even though there are supposed to be no shrines.

It is interesting to note how this story compares with that of Jesus bringing a child back to life, for it typifies

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the great gulf that yawns between Christianity and the Indian religions. India concerns herself solely with the spirit, and has no particular concern for the body or its surroundings. Christianity is more practical, is devoted just as much to concrete good works as to abstract goodness. Here, I think, is a case for judging the tree by its fruits.

Before leaving Amritsar we paid a visit to India's twentieth century place of martyrdom, the Jallianwala bagh where the notorious shooting of 1919 took place. It is a large garden of several acres in extent, rather untidy to look at, and surrounded on all sides by fairly high walls. Already so many legends have accumulated round it that it is difficult to sift the facts. One thing is certain, that whatever the rights and wrongs of the incident may have been, its memory will remain a cancer eating its way into Anglo Indian relations for generations to come. Though we were without a guide we were not left alone, for the only other occupant of the garden, a water-carrier with a pigskin of water slung over his shoulder, came up to us, and drew our attention to the bullet holes in the walls, and to the fairly low wall over which the people tried to escape, and against which, it is said, the heaviest fire was directed.

The facts of the shooting are simple. Just at that time the whole of India was in a state verging on revolt, and in the Punjab in particular conditions were growing serious. The Muslims, who were agitating for a better Peace Treaty with Turkey, had joined hands with the Hindus who were agitating for political reforms. In addition there was a vivid danger of the Afghans, also Mahom

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medans, waging a Holy War from the other side of the Khyber.

Though other Provinces quieted a little, the Punjab grew worse and worse; minor revolts became frequent; communications were often torn down. Amritsar was the storm centre. It was isolated from Lahore, and could get in touch with the General Command only by means of a small portable wireless set. The rioting there grew steadily worse. Houses were burned down, several Europeans were killed, and then an English girl, a school-teacher, was set on by the mob, and murdered.

Mass-meetings were taking place daily, and one morning General Dyer, who was in command, marched through the town, issuing a Proclamation to the effect that any meeting which took place thereafter would be dispersed by gunfire without warning. That afternoon news was brought to him that, in defiance of this Proclamation, a crowd of several thousands had assembled in the Jallianwalabagh, where it was being addressed in a provocative manner by a number of well-known agitators. Immediately he set out with a small body of native troops, and marched straight to the garden. His force entered by the long, narrow passage by which we ourselves had entered, and without warning opened fire on the mob. For ten minutes the firing continued. Then Dyer gave the command to cease fire, and retreated in good order.

The point was that there was only that one entrance to the garden. There was nowhere for the crowd to hide from the bullets. Some tried to climb the low wall the water-carrier showed us, and it is rumoured that Dyer directed fire towards that very point. The death-roll was

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well over a hundred, and the wounded over three times that number.

Exactly what happened will never be known. Some say that Dyer never realized that there was no other exit from the garden, and thought that as the mob did not disappear they were massing to attack him. Others say that it was just a cold-blooded massacre of defenceless civilians. Inquiry followed inquiry, and eventually Dyer was removed from his post. He died shortly afterwards, an embittered old man. But the incipient revolt had been stemmed. The Punjab quietened down as though oil had been poured on a stormy sea. Had he merely dispersed the crowd the rioting would have continued, and grown worse with time. As it was, with the sacrifice of some hundreds, thousands were saved.

Yet out of this incident a new hostility was born. The Jallianwalabagh became the symbol for India's cry for independence, and for many years to come it will be a place of political pilgrimage, and serve as a stimulant to the bitterness which must always lie in the hearts of those who are ruled by an alien race.

## CHAPTER XX

*We find Kim's Gun, see Greek sculpture in the Lahore Museum, make a tonga driver laugh, and rest in the beautiful gardens of Shalimar*

LAHORE is only an hour's journey from Amritsar, and the broad streets of its cantonments provide a welcome change from the narrow lanes of the religious capital of the Sikhs. It is the Provincial capital of the Punjab, and houses so large a European community that one might almost fancy oneself in a European city but for the heat which penetrates into every corner, and the grey-brown dust which turns the trees and parks into ghastly ghosts of their proper selves.

The Mall, a broad street with shops and office buildings along either side, is pleasant enough, and the buildings seem to have escaped the worst of the Victorianisms which ruin Calcutta; although the architect of the Law Courts seems to have persuaded himself that it is wise to leaven his Gothic arches with a few Hindu and Muslim *leit motifs*.

At the far end of this main street we came upon Zam-zama, famous for a generation now as the gun on which Kim was perched when the old Tibetan Lama came that way. It still stands in the same place as is described in the book, and is, so they say, very nearly two hundred years old. Its great wooden wheels are bound with iron, and

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its barrel inlaid with brass designs. It belongs to a time when warfare, if not less cruel, was at least a little more romantic, and it is far more stately, though considerably less deadly, than the hideous modern trophies to be found in many an English village square to day. It is said to be of Persian origin. It certainly comes from a country which was willing to spend much energy and loving care on beautifying its instruments of war.

Following the trail of the Lama we turned into the Lahore Museum which is said to contain the finest collection of Tibetan and Buddhist art in the world, and is renowned everywhere as the home of the famous Graeco Buddhist sculptures. These carvings in bas relief were excavated many years ago from the site near the old city of Taxila, close to the modern Rawalpindi, and now enjoy the honour of a gallery to themselves. They recount in conventional form the life story of the Buddha, but their value lies in the fact that their æsthetic content exhibits clear traces of Grecian influence. The grouping of the figures reminds one far more of the friezes on Greek buildings than of conventional Indian art, their clothes, or rather draperies, belong to the early Grecian period, while the artist has paid a far greater attention to anatomy and perspective than can ever have been the case with a purely Indian craftsman of that period.

It is amazing to think that East and West had met so many years before Vasco de Gama sailed his small fleet into the harbour at Calicut. We are apt to forget Alexander the Great and his almost unbelievable march across Persia and Afghanistan and down through the Khyber into the very heart of the Punjab. These sculptures

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remind one vividly of this passage in history, and show one that, even though Alexander himself failed, the small Greek Colony he founded at Taxila continued to exert its influence over Indian life for generations to come. They help to throw our own history into its proper perspective, so that we can see ourselves standing in clear-cut silhouette against the endless avenue of time. I doubt if any other country in the world—not even Egypt with its pillared temples and its gigantic pyramids—is so pregnant with the vanity of human ambitions as is India. Civilizations lie layer on layer, a prey to archæologists, relics of past pomp and power. One can visualize their steady rise and fall, as though culture flows down the ages like the waves of the sea, now lifting itself high, now sinking and wallowing in a trough of despair.

India is the burial-ground of ambition, and one feels strangely small and humble as one wanders through the echoing halls of dead and forgotten fame.

In the Tibetan Gallery of the Museum we came upon another example of the passage of time. Amongst the robes and prayer-wheels and images of the Buddha and paintings of the Wheel of Life we saw some idols flourishing more than the normal quota of arms, which seemed to belong more to Hinduism than to Buddhism. The Curator happened to come our way as we were looking at them, and we asked him how they came to be there amongst a collection of Buddhist relics. In return he gave us a short lecture on Buddhism.

It was not a religion at all, he declared—at least, not originally. It was intended to take the place of religion, and forbade idolatry of every kind. In the course of

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centuries, however, this side of it came to be obscured, and images began to make their appearance in temples and monasteries. Human nature craved something concrete to worship. However, this took over four hundred years (said the Curator, who appeared to be a true Buddhist at heart), and we must remember that it took only a hundred and fifty years for images to make their appearance in Christianity.

The first idols were fashioned in the form of the Buddha, but eventually he was surrounded by a whole crop of minor dieties, and, though they began by being perfectly normal in appearance, they soon developed various eccentricities. There was, for instance, the goddess whom we had taken for a Hindu diety. She was regarded as a protectress against various dangers, each of which was symbolized by a different object, such as a sword for war or a boat for flood. The question arose of how to incorporate them into the design, and it seemed obvious that she should hold them in her hands. This was simple enough, so long as she acted as insulator against only two dangers, but in time her powers grew, and with them her hands, so that eventually she became possessed of sixteen waving arms.

So time does not merely kill kings and destroy palaces. It corrupts ideas as well. Nothing is safe from the endless process of change and decay.

One morning we drove out to see the Jami Masjid, the Great Mosque. After Agra and Delhi it was a sorry sight, for it had been badly damaged in the Persian invasion, and allowed to deteriorate. The Fort, too, built in the true Mogul tradition, though of earlier date than



those further south, was bleakly deserted and sadly tumbledown. It seemed as though fortune had not favoured this part of the Mogul Empire, which was true enough, for if the British were more competent and wholesale than the Persians, they were not so ruthless, and even seemed to take a perverse pleasure in patching up what their artillery had destroyed. Unfortunately Lahore had passed beyond doctoring before they arrived.

In the afternoon, anxious to see something of the Indian city, I hired another tonga, and did my best to make the driver understand that I wanted to go to a mosque that lay within the city walls. After driving for about twenty minutes he came to a halt at the gate of the Jami Masjid which we had seen that morning. I did my best to point out his mistake to him, but it was anything but easy as he had not a word of English in his vocabulary, and my Hindi was just as poor. To all my sallies he replied by shaking his head, pointing at the Mosque, and saying, "Masjid, Masjid," over and over again. Apparently this was the mosque to which white tourists were normally taken, and he could think of no other that I would want to see.

At last, after I was growing hoarse through shouting, "City! Mosquel! City mosquel" in his ear, and pointing towards the city, some kind of comprehension seemed to dawn on him. He repeated it over to himself several times, as though ruminating deeply, and then burst out into uncontrollable yells of laughter. He recovered quickly, and was just driving off when he pointed to the big Mosque again, and then broke down once more. This went on repeatedly for the rest of the drive. Every now and then he would turn round to me, mutter, "City.

Mosque Eh?" and go off into convulsions once again, much to the danger of the people round about, for it took his mind off the serious problem of driving through the narrow streets. I would have given a lot to know the real cause of his merriment.

Eventually we came to a very old mosque, known as the Sonehri Masjid, which, not being under the care of the Archaeological Department, was very, very dirty. It stood in the angle between two streets, and a flight of dirty steps, on which some fifteen beggars were seated, led up to it. At their summit a small arch in a tall, white washed wall gave entrance to the courtyard. I did not venture through this arch, for the court was indescribably filthy, being covered with a thick layer of dust which in places had been churned into an oily mess of mud. It was only about fifteen yards square, and on the far side the mosque proper made a rather dismal showing, being only a small plaster building surmounted by three golden domes which were so stained as to be almost unrecognizable. People dressed in rags lay all over the court, and even in the mosque itself making the whole picture a positive epic of squalor and filth. Any illusions I may have had about the cleanliness of mosques as compared with Hindu temples were immediately dissipated.

In another part of the city we came to the Wazir Khan Masjid, which had been my real objective all the time. It is a rather fine example of tile work, for the minarets, the gateway and the face of the mosque are all decorated with coloured tiles showing flowers and conventional designs. This decoration is somewhat at variance with the accustomed sobriety of mosques in general, but it seemed a welcome change to my impious eyes.

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Over the entrance was written in Persian :

“Remove thy heart from the gardens of this world,  
and know that this building is the true abode of man.”

Unfortunately it was not very much cleaner than the Sonehri Masjid, and I could not help feeling, with the usual western practicality, that a garden would have been a far healthier place.

It stood on one side of a rather rough square which was filled with a motley assembly of ragpickers' stalls. The shops round it seemed to be occupied mostly by blacksmiths, and the ground was littered with refuse. Ragged children abounded, and, unfortunately, took a keen interest in me and my camera. They followed me here there and everywhere, a band of about twenty, and burst into roars of derisive laughter every now and then. I had the greatest difficulty in keeping up the prestige of the British Raj.

I was more anxious than usual to maintain that prestige here, for Lahore seemed to be even more unfriendly than Calcutta. I received black looks from every quarter, and very few of the smiles that usually fall to one's lot from Indians, who are on the whole a very friendly people. Many passers-by seemed consciously to draw themselves away from my tonga as we drove past, and every now and then I would look up to see someone staring at me with undisguised hostility. It was all very uncomfortable, and I was glad when we reached the city gates, and drove out once again into the broad, open streets of the cantonments.

Next to Bengal the Punjab is the most restless Province

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in India and there certainly seems to be no love lost between the townspeople of Lahore and the British. There is a smouldering hostility beneath the external calm which seems to suggest that, should the opportunity for trouble arise, the Punjab will not be slow in taking advantage of it. It is curious that the Province for which British Rule has done the most should be the least satisfied, but perhaps that is just human nature on the grand scale.

If the Lahore Fort and Mosque have been reduced to ruins unworthy of the magnificence of the Moguls, the same cannot be said of the Shalimar Gardens which lie at some little distance from the town. We drove out there one afternoon, not expecting anything wonderful, and were so fascinated that we stayed there for hours, lying under the cool shade of the trees, and steeping ourselves in the quiet, peaceful atmosphere.

These gardens lie on three levels, the central one being the most perfect. In the centre lies a broad lake which is fed by water from the reflecting pools on the higher level, which passes through a small marble pavilion, and rushes, bubbling and splashing, down a scalloped marble slope. The lake itself is filled with fountains, over a hundred of them, which must provide a magnificent display when they are all working, while in its centre stands a small marble platform, connected to the gardens by a narrow marble causeway. Here dancers would perform for the pleasure of the Emperor, the fountains acting as a screen between him and them until such a time as the performance was ready to begin.

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Four small pavilions stand on the four sides of the lake. One, on the higher level, is that through which the water passes. The others are smaller and all of the same design. All round lie flaming beds of flowers, while here and there immense cypress trees add a touch of formality to the scene.

Aesthetic rumour decries these gardens as far inferior to the famous gardens of Italy and France, but we were perfectly satisfied with what was provided for us here. The purpose of a garden is, presumably, to set the mind at rest, to provide it with an environment of peace and beauty in which it can escape from the humdrum realities of life. If that be true, then the Shalimar Gardens fulfil their functions perfectly, for in their symmetry of form and in their exquisite proportions they lull the mind into a happy serenity in which troubles have no place, and the worries of the world seem very far away.

We lay in the shade of one of the giant cypress trees, and allowed time to slip past us. This was to be our last glimpse of the land of the Moguls, for that evening we were due to board the Frontier Mail, and be carried up to the grim fortresses of the north-west, through which the Mogul hordes had poured, but where they had not tarried. If they have given nothing else to India, they have at least left rich and tangible memories of beauty behind them. Here is a case where the good men do lives after them, for by now their cruelties and their intolerance, their savage massacres and their unscrupulous intrigues, rest only in the pages of history books for those who care to read them, while the works they wrought in marble and in stone remain the memorials by which the world remembers them.

## CHAPTER XXI

*We come to the end of India, and gaze out into the barren reaches of Afghanistan. An unknown quantity interrupts our travels, and we take the train for Bombay*

THE Frontier Mail sounds very romantic and terribly efficient. Towards the end of its journey it lives up to the former quality to a very considerable extent, but our experience did not tend to make us feel that it was abnormally speedy or comfortable. It took over twelve hours to cover a distance less than that between London and Carlisle, stopping at every tiny station on the way—the very antithesis of the Malay, *Kreta-api sambong*. And at each of these stations it rumbled, shunted and blew off steam in a manner fit to wake the dead.

As a consequence we were awake early, and able to enjoy an entirely new kind of scenery. We saw the mighty Indus—mighty even here in the foothills before being fed by the four other rivers of the Punjab—swirling beneath us in a deep gorge, and beating its way round the sharp bend where the strong fort of Attock stands. On either side of us the countryside was bare and jagged, rising into innumerable tiny rocky peaks and cut into a thousand different patterns by the crooked *nullahs*, or watercourses, which the sun had dried into hard, sharp little canyons.

The names of the stations where we stopped began to

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have a familiar flavour about them. Campbellpur, Nowshera and a host more, all of them stored somewhere in our subconscious and breathing a little of the romance of this the stormiest corner of the British Empire. Already we were beginning to feel the glamour and excitement of the land which for century upon century has been the battleground of warring races. As we passed through Peshawar we saw the Fort standing just outside the city walls and at first glance in that early morning light we thought it yet another of those triumphs of Mogul Imperialism. But as we drew nearer we saw that we were mistaken. There was nothing ancient about this one. Its strongly engineered walls looked as though they could have withstood battery upon battery of modern artillery, while its towers and bastions had the strong, simple lines of a modern battleship. Standing on one of the walls, silhouetted against the morning sky, a group of Tommies stood in their shirt-sleeves watching the train go by. They added a living touch to the picture that all the Mogul Forts had lacked.

The North-West Frontier Province is the keystone of Indian integrity. To the east the swamps and jungles of Bengal keep Burmah at a distance; to the west the deserts of Baluchistan create a barrier between India and Persia and Arabia across which it is all but impossible for an army to march; to the north the Himalayas are an almost impregnable wall. Only in the far north-west, where these mountains suddenly dip down to the Khyber and its allied passes is there any hope of an army entering India by land.

For more centuries than known history can trace invaders have broken through this narrow gap and spread

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out on to the rich and fertile plains below And they will do it once again should Great Britain ever relax her hold and let her vigilance drop, if only for a moment The greater part of India's military forces are concentrated here, and there is never a minute of the day or night when the look-outs are not at their posts, or the whole military machine not ready to spring into action at a moment's notice No European frontier, even in these days of alarms and excursions, is as closely guarded or as carefully watched

For atmosphere I should say that the Khyber Pass is unique above all other show places Buildings have atmosphere, towns have atmosphere, streets and church yards have atmosphere, but landscapes in general are either beautiful, or rugged, or pastoral, or breathtaking Adjectives suit them, but they do not have many associations Glencoe in Scotland is blessed with its own horrors, so that one can almost live through the murder of the MacDonalds and the burning and looting of their homes as one stands at the head of the valley with its grim mountains overhanging on either side The scenery fits in with the history

So it does in the Khyber You stand outside the cantonments of Peshawar and look over the level plain to where the mountains rise up in high, jagged ridges, their serrated peaks and gullies etched with astonishing clarity against the cloudless sky The plain is a dull brown colour, almost sandy, and the mountains are the same There are just the two colours, brown and blue, and the atmosphere is so free from dirt that everything stands out in sharp clear lines There is nothing friendly about it It is as grim and as barren as some of those remote hill



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regions in Palestine that figure in religious prints. You feel as though the God of the Old Testament will suddenly come down out of these mountains to wreak his vengeance on a wicked world.

At the entrance to the Khyber the mountains lower their dignity a little, and you can see how like a bottle-neck it is. The plain sweeps out funnelwise from the entrance, and you can imagine how the invading hordes of Timur, say, or Babar, must have flowed through it, and spread themselves out in battle-array before the town. Some of the most decisive battles of the world must have been fought within a few miles of where you stand, for if the Indians had been able to block the way of the invaders they would have had to overflow into other countries, and there is no saying what course history might then have taken. The Khyber is not just the gateway of India; it is, in one way, the safety-valve of the world as well.

The Khyber is no less romantic when seen close to. At the entrance, seeming to lie almost in the very jaws of the Pass, Jamrud Fort stands sentinel of the Indian plains. It was built by Ranjit Singh, the great leader of the Sikhs, when his people held sway over this corner of India, but now it has passed over to his successors, and is one of the many outposts of the British Raj. In its tower you can see the watcher endlessly scanning the horizon through a telescope, alert for anything unusual in the mountains that may demand investigation.

It is here that the military area of the Khyber begins, and a special permit must be produced by those who wish to pass on to the border of Afghanistan. The road breaks into two to facilitate traffic. One branch is for cars; the

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other for the slow moving caravans of camels which are continually passing through, bringing the trade of the north down to the market square in Peshawar. Rather incongruously it is used for troops as well.

It happened that the day we made the trip was one of the occasions when a camel train was passing through, and the Pass was especially well guarded. In this lawless part of the country there is no safety for man or beast unless they are protected by guns. The hills on either side of the Pass are filled with brigands waiting their opportunity to pounce on the traders—or on any unsuspecting quarry for that matter. There are spots less than a mile from the road where no British soldier would dare to go alone, he would stand a good chance of being murdered—for the sake of his rifle, which is the staple unit of wealth in these parts. The road, which is the life line between India and the vast tracts of Asia Minor, is guarded as closely as the Crown Jewels. At almost every corner guards stand rifle in hand. They are not regular soldiers, but tribesmen engaged for this special purpose, and are known as *kbassadars*. They provide their own clothes and rifles, and wear only a distinguishing head dress. They are hardy, bright-eyed men with lean sinewy bodies and muscles of steel. Looking at them, and comparing them with the Indians of the plains it is easy to see why India has so often succumbed to the conquerors from the north west.

As we entered the Pass we were struck by the immense number of fortified posts around us. Almost every little peak and hilltop seemed to have been occupied, small forts and pill boxes stood up against the horizon on either side of us. As we proceeded the mountains closed

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in on us, and we began to climb up a steep gradient along a road which curved sharply round jagged shoulders as it wound its way along the sharp-edged little canyons. At last, after several miles of this we came out on a fairly flat stretch where the walls of the Pass were nearly half a mile apart. Here we saw a small, whitewashed shrine known as the Ali Masjid, which Mahmoud (who had accompanied us on the pretext that he would be of considerable assistance when it came to protecting Nora from abduction) said was the half-way house where "all the people pray to God" for the safety of the camel trains. Its white walls stood out cleanly against the brown of the surrounding hills. It is very old, and generation after generation of merchants and camel-drivers have heaved long sighs of relief on sighting it, for on doing so the worst of the journey's dangers can be considered past.

A few miles further on we entered a narrow defile, a deep cleft in the hills scarcely fifty yards broad. On either side the rugged rocks towered up in terrifying grandeur, while below us the camel road pursued a winding, twisting course, turning this way and that to avoid giant boulders, and crossing from side to side of the narrow river which flowed along the foot of the gorge. It was a sight to set the imagination working, for through this narrow gap the armies of Alexander may have made their way, and the armies of Babar and of Nadir Shah, to name only a few of the great conquerors who have come flooding down this well-trodden route. We felt as though we were trespassing on the stage of history after the performance was over, and all the actors returned to their homes.

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After climbing out of this defile we found ourselves once more on a fairly broad and level stretch, where the two roads ran side by side. In the distance ahead of us we could see the *Kafila*, or camel train approaching, and we drew up so as to have a good view of it when it reached us. All morning the mountains had seemed deserted—the only living being we had seen was an old man leading a mule up into the mountains away from the road—but we had not been at rest for more than a few moments before our car was surrounded by a large crowd which had seemingly crystallized round us out of thin air. These mountains were more heavily populated than we had imagined. They were fierce to look at with their picturesque and ragged clothes and their lean, wiry bodies, but they responded quickly to a smile, showing rows of glistening teeth which would have done credit to any toothpaste—had they ever used it. There were several children amongst them, and when I pointed to my camera their elders arranged them in a line for me to photograph. They must have been used to it, for I had given Mahmoud some money to be distributed amongst them when the picture had been taken, and no sooner did they hear the click of the camera than they broke line, and mobbed the poor man. In self-protection he flung the money on the ground, and a scramble ensued that set the dust flying all round us as they struggled for the annas and pies.

By this time the *kafila* was almost on us. In front marched two *kbassadars* holding their rifles in their hands and looking as self-conscious as the London policemen who are told off to lead a political procession. They were followed by a number of mules, all so heavily laden that

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their bales hid everything but an inquisitive head and two long, shaggy ears. Whole families came along in attendance. Some of the smallest children sat on top of the bales, but everyone else walked, women as well as men. Some of the women carried their babies, while others were almost as heavily laden as the mules. The men, of course, travelled fairly light, but perhaps there was more excuse for it here, as one never knows when fighting will take place, and it is best for those who may have to fight to remain unburdened.

This was merely the advance-guard. The *kafila* proper followed after an interval of about a hundred yards. Along came the camels lurching from side to side on their lanky, unwieldy legs. Their bundles were heavy, but they plodded on and on like machines, a bunch of them in the front, but the traditional long chain in single file behind. They looked very proud and austere, as all camels do, and lunched along with their noses pointed high in the air as though contemptuous of their masters and of everybody else. Their drivers plodded along beside them, some leading magnificent dogs which we recognized as Afghan hounds. Hens had been tied to many of the bales, and they flapped their wings desperately in their attempts to escape. They had been brought along to guarantee a regular supply of fresh eggs, for these *kafilas* are a long time on the road, and it is cheaper to bring your own provisions than to buy them on the way. This one had been marching for twelve days, and was not due to reach Peshawar for another twenty-four hours.

The *kafila* was about half a mile long, which seemed immense to us, although it was reckoned as one of

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the smallest to pass through. In the height of the trading season they frequently reach a length of five miles, and are like full size armies on the march. They are amongst the last relics of a trading system that dates back to long centuries before Christ was born to the days when the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Rome used to receive the spices of the East from camel trains that made their way all the distance across the deserts of Asia Minor. The steamship has done much to rob them of their usefulness, and road and rail are steadily encroaching still further on their preserves. They still make their way down into Kashmir, and through the Khyber, and sometimes across the deserts of Baluchistan, while in the wastes of Asia Minor they are still the main means of transport, but in general their day has passed, and to future generations they will be remote antiquities to be classed with the sailing ship and the stage-coach. It seems as though romance is steadily deserting the world, but you never know, perhaps it is just waiting to re-enter it in a modern guise.

The Pass continued to climb, but gradually up a slow slope, and not in the giddy curves and steep gradients we had encountered in its lower reaches. In one place the mountains receded so far on either side of us that it almost seemed as though we had come out on a plain. For a good mile on either side the earth was perfectly flat, and we found here the first evidence of habitation we had seen since leaving Jamrud. Small villages were dotted here and there, each strongly fortified against marauding tribesmen, and equipped with look-out towers. The British Raj does not extend beyond the road. This part of India is rather like the Native States, for the tribesmen

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are a law unto themselves, and unless British interests are threatened they are allowed to live in their own way, fighting their own feuds, and indulging their strong instinct for brigandage. They must lead a precarious existence. It is hard enough to scrape a living from these bare mountains, let alone guard it against your fellow men. There are two wolves to keep from the door—the wolf of hunger, and the wolf that steals up with rifle in hand. Every night watchers are posted in the village towers, and even during the daytime the gates in the village walls are always closed. To relax means bloodshed, robbery and rape. It is a hard life, but one that breeds men. These tribes are tough, hardy and fearless, and present a constant embarrassment to the diplomatists who are seeking to protect India by winning their allegiance.

The Khyber needs nothing to strengthen its terrifying aspect. Its ruggedness and barrenness are sufficient to impress its nature on any observer. Nevertheless, these tiny villages, so strongly fortified and so grimly guarded, add a striking note of desperation to its appearance, and make one realize that here at any rate man has no time for the niceties of civilized behaviour.

A mile or two further on we came to Landi Kotal, the tiny garrison town which acts as focal centre of the outposts dotted all along this sector of the Afghan frontier. It is nothing but barracks, administrative buildings and a few shops. I doubt if there can be half a dozen civilians in the whole place. The buildings are laid out neatly in a very English fashion, so that the visitor would almost get the impression that he is in a garden suburb but for the fact that everyone he sees is in uniform. It is amusing

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to see how here that same humour has come to the front as our soldiers displayed in the trenches in France. In a small square round which are grouped the bungalows of the officers in command several notice-boards have been set up. The square itself is called Trafalgar Square, and the streets opening off it are the Strand, Whitehall, and, with a fine disregard for topographical pedantry, Piccadilly.

The town boasts a small cinema as well. It is perhaps a sign of the times that here, far up in that no man's land surrounded by murderous tribesmen in a spot which for centuries has been on the very edge of civilization, the film that was being shown on the day of our visit was none other than H. G. Wells's "Things to Come".

A few miles further on we came to the top of the Pass, where we stopped by the military picket. We climbed out of the car, and walked the remaining fifty yards to the top of the slope.

We had come to the end of India. Below us, stretching as far as the eye could see, the Pass dipped down towards the Afghan plains, widening out as it receded like a gigantic funnel. Dotted here and there were a few defence works, while about two miles ahead we could see the fort of Landi Khana, the last of all the British outposts. This side of the Pass was not as rugged as the Indian side, but it was just as bleak. The prevailing colour was the same dusty brown, and the saw-toothed edges of the mountains stood out just as sharply and uncompromisingly against the blue of the sky. Far beneath us a single silver streak relieved the monotony. It was the Kabul River winding its devious route through the Afghan plains.



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Hot and dusty and uninviting as it was, the scene exercised a tremendous pull on our desires. We had travelled all the way across India from Calcutta to Peshawar, and now, at the end of the journey, we were gazing out on a new land, a land which, by reason of its strange and almost frightening approach, seemed even more inviting than what lay behind. What lay beyond that dusty horizon? What would we discover if we were to brave all the rigours of red tape and obtain the necessary permit to go on? It was very tempting, but our purse-strings had been loosened too often of late, and regretfully we turned our backs on it. One day, perhaps, we shall go back.

The heat was appalling. Our car sped back over the road by which we had come, but there was no relief to be found. A burning wind scorched our faces, and minute particles of dust found their way into every pore. Down through Landi Kotal, down past the fortified villages, down into the narrow gorge where we stopped to watch the last remnants of the *kafila* slowly trudging along the road beneath us, down to the Ali Masjid where the advance guard had already camped for the midday rest all round the shrine. As the mules and camels browsed on the scanty shrubs the men and women fell upon their knees offering thanks to Allah for having permitted them to reach thus far without loss. Even here the British Raj is denied the praise that is its due.

Down over that twisting, swerving road to the mouth of the Pass, down past Jamrud Fort, where the watcher in the tower was still anxiously scanning the mountains through his telescope. And then that last long run across the plains into Peshawar. A good lunch followed a cold

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bath We would not have changed places with Akbar himself

In the afternoon we drove into Peshawar. It is an ancient city which has borne more than a fair share of the trials and tribulations of this world. Standing square in the path of conquest it has suffered looting and burning too often to be without scars, but it has always risen again, and it bears itself proudly like some old warrior who has come through too many battles to hold any fear for the future in his heart. A grim city, a tense city, a city always on the alert.

One of the civilized niceties which the tribesmen cannot bring themselves to entertain is the passport system. As a consequence it is difficult to keep track of them when they make their way down into India in small groups, and Peshawar has the distinction of containing a far greater number of these nomads than any other Indian city. As you walk through its streets you see them everywhere, fierce and arrogant. With blankets flung round their shoulders and coloured turbans wound round their heads they look exactly as though they have stepped straight from the illustrations in a book on frontier fighting. Some come from so far north that they are almost white-skinned, while many of them have dyed their beards red as a sign that they have made the pilgrimage to the Holy City of Mecca, as the Prophet ordained that every good Mohammedan should do.

There are scarcely any Hindus to be seen, and as you walk through the streets and markets you gradually discover that you are not in India after all. You are in a political sense, but not geographically or racially. You

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passed out of India when you crossed the Indus. India is Hindu. The Muslims are merely importations, well established by this time, but not the real India. Up here in the North-West Frontier Province, where they are in an overwhelming majority and remain almost untouched by the Hinduism of the plains, they belong far more to their native hills. Their roots still lie across the Khyber. They have not dug them up and re-rooted themselves in the land of their adoption.

We found Peshawar far cleaner than either Amritsar or Lahore. Its smells were few, and such as there were rose mostly from herbs and spices, trenchant enough, but not too unpleasant. The fruit market was something on which to feast the eyes. It sent our thoughts back to California where the fruit markets are vivid blazes of colour with the fruit all polished and arranged in large piles. Here it was just the same, melons at this stall, oranges at that, mangoes here, apples there, all looking so fresh and clean that our mouths watered for them. It was the first time that we had seen food in an Indian market that we wanted to eat.

The copper market, too, was a source of real delight. Urns, samovars (are they a trace of Russian influence?) coal-boxes, vases, bowls, jugs, basins, lamps, were all piled up outside the shops, their ruddy colour brightly reflecting the rays of the sun overhead. The workshops were open to the streets, and, looking in, we saw the craftsmen at work, beating away at the hot metal, melting it on fires which were kept alive with huge bellows, or cutting out designs on the finished articles.

Much as we liked Peshawar, however, we were glad that we had Mahmoud there to escort us. It is a frighten-

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ing city The scowls we received in Calcutta and Lahore were unpleasant, but there people scowled because there was nothing else for them to do Here the people did not scowl, they remained austere aloof, or else crowded curiously round us on the pavement, at close quarters they seemed scarcely civilized, and made cold shivers run down our spines Nothing on earth would persuade me to walk through Peshawar alone at night

We were not to have the opportunity of doing so anyway That night I woke up shivering, and pulled up the blanket Half an hour later I was so hot that I had to get rid of it Before long I was shivering once more

The doctor came in the morning, and said he thought it was malaria, prescribed some remedies, and left me wishing that we had stayed safely at home in London Next morning he came again, and as the fever was no better thought that it might be pneumonia On the next morning there was still no improvement, and so, fearing typhoid, he carried me off to the hospital, leaving Nora lonely and forlorn in the charge of Mahmoud

Mahmoud rose to the occasion like the hero we always knew him to be He appointed himself Nora's guide, philosopher and friend Never once did he leave her, but dogged her like a shadow, squatting outside her door whenever she was in the hotel and sitting in the tonga beside the driver whenever she came to the hospital to see me Peshawar, he said, was a dangerous place There were bad men there who made a speciality of kidnapping white women and carrying them off into the hills That was not going to happen to the Memsahib when the Sahib was not there to protect her I have often wondered

what happened to Mahmoud after we left India. I hope he has found plenty of good jobs with travellers more affluent than we were, and that his wife and family in Calcutta, of whom he never tired of telling us, are enjoying the fruits of a deserved prosperity.

A blood-test showed that it was not typhoid, but that was as far as we ever got in the diagnosis. After twenty-four hours in hospital the fever disappeared, and I was left feeling very much as though my blood had been watered down to the consistency of thin tea, and my bones transformed into some jelly-like substance. It was another week before I could stand on my legs again.

Meanwhile the doctor had become our Good Samaritan. His wife had been away for a few days, but on her return they took Nora to stay with them, and invited me to convalesce in their house as well. That fortnight spent with them is one of our last memories of India, and a very happy one too. In the course of it we discovered that India was a much more pleasant place than we had ever imagined.

We had not intended to end our travels at Peshawar; Rajputana was calling us, and the strange lands of the Eastern and the Western Ghats, but this sudden, uncalled-for illness wrote *finis* to our plans. We stayed in Peshawar till I was fit enough to trust myself to the Indian railways, and then we said our adieu, and boarded the Frontier Mail once more, this time *en route* for Bombay.

We were sad as we saw Peshawar slipping away past the train window. We had come to be very fond of India in spite of its climate, in spite of its dirt and smells, in spite of its atmosphere of suspicion and distrust; and we knew that now we were saying good-bye. The train

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would take us to Bombay, where we would stay in a European hotel in a European city, and all the mystery and romance of the strangest of all the countries in the world would lie behind us

Campbellpur and Nowshera slipped past us To the north the mountains of Kashmir appeared a hazy blue on the horizon At Attock the turmoil of the Indus slid away beneath us We settled down in our compartment, and gave ourselves up to lingering memories of the many months that had slipped away so quickly since *SS Gorgon* turned her bow away from Australia's nor' west coast

## CHAPTER XXII

*We wait in Bombay for a ship to carry us home, and speculate a little about what the future holds for India*

IT took us forty-eight hours to reach Bombay, but after the first slow meander down to Lahore the train picked up speed, stopped less often, and became reasonably comfortable. At Delhi our through carriage was transferred to another railway, and we found ourselves in a new India whose existence we had suspected, although we had never come across it. We found it not in the scenery through which we were carried, but in the train itself.

Hitherto India had always been exuberantly Indian. The environment was anything but European. One of the most obvious examples of this had been the servants, who invariably dressed in Indian clothes, and wore neat turbans round their heads. In every hotel where we had stayed we had been served our meals by waiters who were dressed up to kill in a special uniform, usually a long, white skirted coat, jodhpur trousers, a scarlet sash, and a spotless turban bearing the hotel's name in red or gold letters. But when we went to the dining-car for breakfast shortly after leaving Delhi, we were surprised to find that all this had vanished. The waiters were sleek young men in black trousers and mess-jackets, their dark hair glistening with oil. We were coming into an India which

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had been westernized, an India which begins at Bombay, and stretches out only along the railways

Southern India as a whole is even more Indian than the parts we had just come from. Down by Madura and Trichinopoly Hinduism has reached a peak which can be equalled only in Benares. But Bombay is a law unto itself. It is more of a European city than an Eastern city, and has adapted itself to European manners more quickly than even Simla. It has its native quarter, of course, but it is a native quarter that lives in exile. Bombay belongs even less to India than does Peshawar. Peshawar is at least Eastern. Bombay merely happens to have been built in the East, and it seems a little ill at ease there.

To the new comer who makes it his first experience of India, it must have a tremendous fascination, but at the end of the journey it comes rather as an anti-climax. Its broad boulevards and huge apartment houses are far too modern and clean, its sea promenades and its sophisticated dance halls too out of tune with all that one has already seen. You look back over those thousands of square miles of plain and those millions of villagers and peasants, and ask yourself what they can possibly have in common with these broad streets and tall, modern buildings and the general atmosphere of wealthy self-satisfaction which is the hallmark of Bombay. And the answer must be that they have precious little in common, so far as any blood relationship is concerned at any rate.

But from another point of view the two have a lot in common. Bombay is a sign of the times, it stands in the very vanguard of India's future. Here a new India is being forged, an India which will be held together by stout commercial bonds, an India which will be welded



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into one in spite of itself, not by force of arms, but by the power of the rupee. Bombay is known as the Millionaire's City. It has fathered great commercial and industrial enterprises; railway companies and insurance companies, great trading systems and banks have grown from tiny beginnings in its back streets. And there is still more to come. The city, more than any other in India, has acquired the business point of view. Its citizens are on the look out for opportunities; they see all India lying there before them, a vast land waiting for development, hindered only by the cloying tentacles of tradition. They are seeking eagerly to bring India up to date, and there are many amongst them who stand in the very forefront of the fight to create an India which is capable of taking its place alongside the great nations of the world.

It is not a revolutionary city. It is far too well endowed with the world's goods. But its people have the vision to see that with India it is a case of sink or swim. In this modern world it is no use relying too much on others. So far Great Britain has been able to carry India along with her, but only as an encumbrance, and not as a partner. Probably she did not want a partner until recently, when it was seen that the encumbrance was becoming a little too heavy. Whatever the British attitude may be, however, it is clear that India's salvation must lie with India alone, and that her future can only be safeguarded if the whole country can shake off the chains which the priesthood and the climate have heaped upon it. Otherwise even British power will not succeed in making India into the land it might be.

Bombay knows this, and it knows that India has all the makings of greatness in this modern world. It has never

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achieved international greatness before. Even the Great Moguls were great only in themselves. They never made their country feared or respected abroad.

Modern conditions have provided opportunities such as have never been known before. They have altered the face of the world so completely that it would be difficult to put any limit to what the future may hold. Bombay certainly sees greatness in the future. It sees India as an Eastern United States bound up in a busy web of internal commerce, criss-crossed by great highways, producing abundantly, not only from its fields, but from its mines and factories as well. All the materials are there. It is just a question of setting the machine in action.

And yet, I wonder. So many people have held high hopes of this strange, lackadaisical land that pessimism is, perhaps, a little more justified than it might be elsewhere. There is so much to fight against, and so little of it is tangible that one might almost despair of success. Individual fortunes can be made, but that is very different from national fortune. India has known eras of great culture and peace, but it has never been a land of progress, and to hope to make it so is to challenge the tradition of unnumbered centuries. It is a high ambition, but one which will prove very hard to accomplish.

Two very different factors have combined to make Bombay what it is. The first is its geographical position. It is the first port of call for ships coming from the West. Alexander Smith once said of the doctor in Dreamthorpe that he stood on the very confines of existence, he was eternally welcoming newcomers and saying farewell to those who were going away. The same may be

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said of Bombay. Almost every Official from the Viceroy down to the junior civil servant out for the first time must arrive there, and go on by train to Delhi, or wherever he is to be stationed. And when going home on leave, or saying good-bye for the last time, the hills behind the city are the last thing he will see from the ship's rail. It is, perhaps, a sign of why Anglo-Indian relations are not always as smooth as they should be, that a common joke heard in clubs from one end of the country to the other is that the best view in India is "Ballard Pier over the rear end".

Tourists, too, are frequently to be seen in Bombay. They come on World Cruises, stay for a couple of nights, maybe, making whoopee in the hotels and night-clubs, and then pass on to do the same thing somewhere else.

Naturally Bombay is not as other cities. Though, of course, it has its own business to attend to, it is also very much of a railway station and a port. Through it troops an immense transient population of wealthy people to whom it must cater. Passengers and freight pour through it, leaving generous pickings as they go. It has always been so. Bombay has developed a tradition of selling expensive but luxurious hospitality.

But, more important than this, Bombay is the home of the Parsee community. There are only a few hundred thousand of them altogether but they have exercised an influence on Indian history out of all proportion to their numbers, and have made Bombay in particular reflect the result of their activities. To understand them it is necessary to trace back their history to those dim days centuries ago when the Parsees were chased from their home in Persia, and, after much wandering, came to India, just

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as the Jews came to Europe after they had been expelled from Palestine. They settled in Karachi, adopted Indian dress, and slowly acclimatized themselves to their new surroundings. Later, another persecution drove them down to Bombay where they have been allowed to live down to the present day.

They are the millionaires of the city. Though they adopted many Indian customs they maintained their religion—Zoroastrianism—and kept it free from defilement by any of the Indian creeds. This gave them an advantage which no other foreigners in India have ever enjoyed. They lived in the country like the conquering Moguls, and yet they did not succumb to it. They kept their vitality and their own religion, as the British do, and yet settled in India as the British have not. Without actually becoming Indians, they identified themselves with India, and linked their own fortunes to those of India as a whole.

Like the Jews they became financial experts rather than landowners or craftsmen. They learned the art of making money from money. When the West began to introduce its own ways into India they were the first to realize all the implications of this new method of life. They adopted western business methods, became bankers, insurance brokers and financiers, and did their best to create in India an Indian-owned (they regarded themselves as Indians) financial system. To a large extent they succeeded. They became the leaders of Indian finance and Indian industry. But English men were in the field against them, and enjoyed the blessing of the official smile. This identified them with India more than ever before. They felt themselves ranged

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on the side of the Indian against the European. Though they never went to extremes they produced some of India's greatest Liberals, and to-day the Legislative Council contains at least one Parsee who insistently demands a greater share of the country's wealth for the Indian masses.

Internally their influence has been widely felt. Beside and behind them stand all those who wish to see India stripped of its traditional impedimenta, and modernized. *The fight for a better status for women, the demand for the abolition of untouchability, the campaign against communalism, they all owe a great deal to Parsee leadership and support.*

Naturally enough, this small community has transformed Bombay, which is the base from which all its activities have been directed. Out in the suburbs you can see magnificent dwellings, almost palaces, surrounded by lovely gardens which blaze all the year round with flowers. They are the "Bonanza" homes of the new India, the result of a novel kind of gold rush in which the Parsees have come out victorious. Like the Chinese in Malaya, they are far wealthier than the individual English who live in India, although their profits are doubtless small when compared with those of the great trading companies which have their headquarters in the West.

They have been the chief cause of the modernization of Bombay. They have made it into a European city because they have become almost Europeans themselves. Without their initiative it might still be another Calcutta, a city on which the West has made its mark, but where it has not made its home.

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We did not stay for long in Bombay. My illness had been more severe than I had imagined, and I was anxious only to get on board a ship headed for home. While we waited for it we passed the time pleasantly, but not energetically, living rather as we had lived in Singapore, but somewhat constricted by the iron bands of Prestige.

We visited the Bombay Yacht Club, that august pillar of society which allows bank clerks to pass through its portals, but which blackballed Sir Thomas Lipton because he sold tea over a counter, and there we sat on the terrace listening to a military band as we watched the P & O liners come and go. We saw the Parsee Towers of Silence where the dead are laid to be picked to the bone by vultures, so that *none of the four elements—earth, air, fire and water—shall be polluted*. We shuddered a little as we watched the great birds swooping in the air. We visited the Prince of Wales's Museum, and stared enviously at the collection of Oriental Art presented to it by Sir Ratan Tata, the Parsee millionaire. There was a statue of him in the Museum's main hall, and if it had not been for the name inscribed on the base we would have taken it for a statue of one of the Viceroys. The thick hair, the curly moustache, the skirted tail-coat, even the grave, aristocratic features were all eloquent of a mid-Victorian Statesman.

In the evenings we would stroll along the waterfront. Make no mistake about it, Bombay is a very beautiful city, ringed in by soft hills and by the sea. To walk there at sunset is to enjoy one of India's highest prizes. Frequently we would go to the Gateway of India, the grandiose building on the waterfront where the Viceroy

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receives the homage of the Indian Princes when he arrives for the first time. Thousands would collect there in the evening, promenading up and down, women mixing indiscriminately with the men because the Parsees have always held that men and women should occupy equal stations in life. Often young Indians, straight from Oxford by all appearances, would come racing down to the waterfront in sports cars accompanied by girls, just as though all the disabilities under which Indian women suffered were things of the past.

Sometimes we would go to one of the hotels to dance, and there we would see parties of Indians seated at the tables, the men in faultless evening dress, the women looking very lovely in saris which sparkled with gold and silver brocade.

Our ten days passed very quickly and quietly. At last the time came for us to go. Mahmoud accompanied us down to Ballard Pier, and did his last service by seeing our luggage safely stowed on board. There was still half an hour to go, and he stood there patiently on the wharf, waiting to see the last of us. To our astonishment and complete embarrassment when the ropes were being cast off two great crocodile tears appeared in his eyes and trickled down his cheeks. He pulled out his handkerchief, but instead of using it to wipe them away he gave us a half-hearted wave, and returned it to his pocket. We were immensely touched, and still remain so even though we have been told that it is usual for all Indian servants to extract the last ounce of sentiment from a parting.

We almost felt like crying ourselves. There was "Ballard Pier over the rear end", and we did not feel that it was at all a nice view. It meant that we were going

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from India, where we had seen more beautiful things than anywhere else in the course of our travels, and we were very, very sad. As the last of the land slipped away into the midday haze we said good-bye, and knew that henceforth we would have to be contented with memories such as those of Kinchunjanga at dawn, the Taj Mahal floating like a ghost in the soft moonlight, or Gwalior Fort standing bleak and stern against the glowing evening sky.



## EPILOGUE

"AND so what?" asked the Awful Child.

"Eh?" said the Traveller, starting out of his dream about the Fort at Gwalior.

"I mean, what does it all amount to? Are you just going to leave it flat like that? I thought all the best books contained a moral."

"The moral——" began the Traveller ponderously.

"Oh, I don't want to hear it. Not just now anyway. I only skipped through, and looked at the pictures. It seemed sort of funny to end up without a soliloquy. I skipped plenty of them in other parts of the book."

"The moral," continued the Traveller with a frown, "is a simple one. The East is passive. The West is active. The East must either change its nature or be swept away."

"Oh," said the Awful Child.

There was a short silence. Then:

"Does it matter?"

"Of course it matters. What do you think is going to happen to the world if we don't keep one eye on the future, and look where we are going?"

"I don't know. Perhaps you're right." He sounded doubtful. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Do?" The Traveller was perplexed. "It's not in my hands. I've issued my warning. If people don't act on it, then I can't help it. I might deal with the subject at greater length in another volume though," he added hopefully.

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"Oh, no Don't do that," put in the Awful Child hurriedly. "I'm sure one is quite enough. Quite enough. Why do you write books?"

"To impart information," replied the Traveller. "To let one half of the world see how the other half lives. To foster the concord of nations by telling them about each other."

The Awful Child sniggered

"You know," he said, "I think the real reason you write books is because you like doing it Do you travel to impart information and foster the concord of nations too?"

The Traveller looked round to see if there was anyone else in the room Opening the door he peeped into the corridor, and saw that there was no one outside.

"To be perfectly confidential," he said in a stage-whisper in the Awful Child's ear, "I travel because I love seeing strange places and strange people, and because I'm frightfully curious about the rest of the world And I write books because I think it's fun to write books. Now, what do you think of that?"

"Father says you'd be better employed doing an honest job, instead of frittering away your time."

"Does he, indeed?" said the Traveller, nettled. "And what, pray, is your opinion?"

"Oh, I think you might pass yourself off as a Professor"

"Very likely. Very likely," said the Traveller absent-mindedly, reaching out for an Atlas with one hand, and a Shipping Guide with the other.